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General Assembly
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6th meeting
Friday, 10 May 2002, 3.00 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda items 8 and 9 (*continued*)

Review of the achievements in the implementation and results of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s

Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade

Draft resolution (A/S-27/L.1)

The President: The Assembly will first hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Robert G. Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe.

President Mugabe: It is with great pleasure that I address this important gathering. At the World Summit for Children, held in September 1990, we issued a Declaration and Plan of Action that was endorsed by 181 countries. Subsequently, 155 of those countries have prepared national plans of action for children. That conference set forth a vision or a first call for children by establishing seven major and 20 supporting goals that were considered implementable by the year 2000. It is for that reason that, as we meet here for three days, we are reviewing progress so far made towards fulfilling the commitments made 12 years ago.

Children are every nation's tomorrow, and the nature and quality of that future is dependent on how they are nurtured by their families, by the schools they attend and by society in general. In a world that has seen tremendous technological advances, posterity will indict the present generation if it is unable to give food to its children and uphold all their other rights.

In 1990 Zimbabwe was among the first group of nations to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and since then it has rigorously done its best to implement its provisions. However, like many other developing countries, Zimbabwe — even before the 1990 Summit — has always recognized that poverty, hunger, disease, neglect, discrimination, abuse and illiteracy hinder families and States from fulfilling and upholding the rights of the child. For Zimbabwe, poverty and disease, now compounded by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, remain major obstacles to upholding the rights of the child. We are therefore pleased to note that at the recent International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Mexico, the international community affirmed that sustainable development is essential to poverty eradication. Let me hasten to add that sustainable development can be assured only if investment in it has children's development as the main target.

The racially imbalanced distribution of resources in my country has, over years, also impacted negatively on the ability of children to fully enjoy their rights. Zimbabwe, as the Assembly is aware, inherited a society divided along the lines of race, with the

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minority white settler community enjoying the ownership of most of the fertile land and other wealth-creating resources. The majority of the poor indigenous population of about 14 million was forced to reside in the rural areas known in the colonial era as "native reserves", where the soils, rainfall and general infrastructure are poor. It is in those backward rural areas that my Government has been struggling to eliminate such diseases as schistosomiasis, malaria, cholera and others.

Over the years, and in pursuance of our policy of health for all by the year 2000, we have taken vigorous measures to increase access to health amenities — such as the building of provincial and district hospitals and corresponding clinics. Zimbabwe is indeed proud to be among developing countries that have, through immunizing most children, successfully fought for the eradication of such diseases as polio, neo-natal tetanus, diphtheria and measles. We have also successfully fought iodine deficiency. Since 1996, when donors withdrew their aid, we have purchased all vaccines from our own fiscus.

Our education-for-all programme, adopted at independence in 1980, has been second to none: the average child in Zimbabwe now has access to education for 11 years. The decade-end review of the 1990 World Summit indicators shows that primary school enrolment in Zimbabwe had increased to 89 per cent by the year 2000, with a completion rate of 80 per cent. Our literacy rate has also now risen to 87 per cent.

The land programme currently under way seeks to assure the future of our nation, and especially that of our children, as it now makes them owners of their land and masters of their destiny. The programme has already demonstrated, contrary to conventional wisdom, that the young and professional classes can successfully engage in agriculture. This phenomenon will ensure that agriculture will be no longer just a means of subsistence, but a major source of wealth as it stimulates industrial development and thus acts as an important factor in poverty alleviation, a sine qua non for the creation of a world fit for children.

To protect children from abuse, the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act has been amended to enable the operation of a victim-friendly courts system that ensures that perpetrators of child sexual abuse get maximum punishment. In addition, children's participation in different forums focusing on their rights has richly informed society and policy makers alike.

However, for Zimbabwe, and indeed the entire region of the Southern Africa Development Community, the fight against HIV/AIDS, a major child killer, is bound to be a protracted battle. To fight the poverty which worsens the effects of the pandemic, the Government has instituted a poverty alleviation action programme that assists with the education and health care of poor children, while the public assistance programme helps with housing and other needs of poor families.

Despite imperialist and neo-colonialist efforts to subject my country to intolerable and unjustified sanctions, we remain resolved to defend the sovereignty of our nation and to ensure the future of our children. Hence, Zimbabwe will never be a colony again, in the interests of our nation and, especially, of our children.

In conclusion, allow me to reaffirm my country's commitment to the global effort to create a world environment fit for children. This summit should take all necessary measures in the resulting plan of action and move towards fulfilling the 1990 Summit's vision of a first call for children. Let us work to put food in every child's mouth.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mathieu Kérékou, President of the Republic of Benin.

President Kérékou (*spoke in French*): Let me begin, in speaking from this universal rostrum and amid this array of eminent participants from every continent of the world, by warmly hailing the felicitous initiative of Secretary-General Kofi Annan in calling on us to pause so as to undertake a comprehensive review of the past 11 years of intensive activity at the national and international levels to promote the survival, protection and harmonious development of children.

My country, Benin, welcomes the holding of this special session devoted exclusively to children and hopes that our meetings will produce tangible results able to provide a better future for all the children of our respective countries.

In Benin, the problems of children hold a significant place in the concerns of the State and in the

social policy of the Government's programme of action. Thus, a number of measures well known to the representatives of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Benin, have been undertaken in order to ensure the methodical implementation of a new concept, based on the commitments undertaken at the 1990 World Summit for Children, that attaches special importance to children and adolescents.

All of these actions, which are founded in institutional arrangements and involve an increasing contribution from the State in the education and health care of children, seek primarily to reduce infant, child and maternal mortality; to meet the basic needs of the family and to promote its role in ensuring the well-being and development of children; to exempt girls from school fees in rural areas and to create residential centres for them in every department; and to promote the basic education of girls in rural and urban areas. In this context, an initiative known as "girl for girl" has been developed that places young girls under the guidance of older schoolgirls in the school environment.

We should also mention the patient and unified struggle being waged against female sexual mutilation, sexual exploitation and the worst forms of child labour. Thanks to the assistance of non-governmental organizations and international institutions, encouraging results have been achieved in this regard, but they remain inadequate and limited, given the magnitude, acuteness and complexity of the problems besetting the least developed countries.

Such social problems associated with the phenomenon of poverty largely arise from and are explained by the crushing burden of debt, the iniquity of the international trading system and the ongoing decrease in official development assistance. Given this picture of contrasting light and shadows, it is clear that much remains to be done in order to ensure that children in the least developed countries enjoy the bare minimum necessary for a decent and fulfilling life.

Nowadays, the international community agrees to recognize that the protection of children, the fight against internal and cross-border trafficking of children and action to reduce poverty are the major challenges ahead. I would recall that my country was egregiously and cynically singled out a few months ago by certain international media as a hub of the vile phenomenon of child trafficking. In that regard, intellectual and moral honesty compels us to identify the true nature and context of this question.

As everyone knows, it is a reality in Africa that one of the oldest and most current forms of social mutual assistance and community spirit is the care of children from disadvantaged backgrounds by families or friends who enjoy better living and working conditions. Unfortunately, the rapid deterioration of the socio-economic situation on our continent and the frenetic profiteering of many unscrupulous individuals have perverted this once commendable practice into an inhuman traffic in children.

The only positive conclusion that the international community should draw from this is that the fight against poverty has been and remains the cornerstone of every noble action intended to eradicate the abject phenomenon of child trafficking. That is the resolve of the Government of Benin, which has taken bold steps to eradicate this scourge of our times by creating local committees to combat child trafficking, with the participation of the people, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies, including UNICEF. I take this opportunity to express my country's gratitude to all those partners that have involved themselves and are assisting us in all our tireless efforts to protect the rights of children.

I am convinced that, by building on the achievements of the past 11 years; by continuing to prioritize the needs and rights of children; by mitigating the ravages of endemic diseases and the HIV/AIDS pandemic; and by putting an end to the Machiavellian manipulation of young minds, together we shall be able to win our battle to ensure a better future for our children.

The strong and united political resolve of all States members of the international community and large-scale action through the effective mobilization of resources devoted to children are required if we are to meet the many challenges facing our peoples and States today. I wish our work every success.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Fradique Bandeira Melo de Menezes, President of Sao Tome and Principe.

President Melo de Menezes (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): In addressing this forum, I would like first to greet everyone present and to express the hope that this

meeting will lead us to take sensible decisions with a view to preparing a better future for our children.

In 1990, when Governments adopted the Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and a Plan of Action to implement it, we were given an opportunity to launch a process that could lead to a true change in the lives of those who, as one poet has said, are "the best of the world". Back then, the way in which a large sector of humanity, our children, lived on the margins compelled us to take a firm stand with a view to making changes to prioritize our children.

More than a decade has passed since that Summit took place in 1990. Today, we are meeting together once again, this time to take stock and, more importantly, to confront the present situation of children at the beginning of this new century. From 1990 to the present, the world has seen unprecedented progress in terms of mankind's capacity for accomplishment and of the affirmation of human potential.

Because of new information and communication technology, we are almost instantly aware of everything that happens in the world. As a result, we are much closer to one another, and there is a tendency for other people's causes to become our own.

Glaring images that evoke our incapacity to fulfil completely the Plan of Action adopted at the 1990 World Summit for Children multiply daily before our eyes. Despite many countries' efforts to fulfil the objectives established then, much undoubtedly remains to be done so that one day we can be proud of having contributed to a better life for children, ensuring acceptable conditions for their survival and sufficient protection to ensure their full development.

The persistence of armed conflict and instability in many places — especially in poor countries with fragile economies — and the grave humanitarian situation resulting from the great numbers of refugees have created a great obstacle to the success of social action aimed at improving children's well-being. There is a need for more peacekeeping missions and for more dialogue to ensure the well-being, security and protection of children. It is time to eliminate forever all acts of violence, exploitation and abuse of children.

We welcome the end of the armed conflict in Angola. Surely the environment of peace, together with the country's resources, will bring opportunities for economic growth and for human development. Moreover, we support all initiatives of the United Nations and of other international organizations to establish peace and stability in the world.

Over the years, Sao Tome and Principe has been working on behalf of children, but we are aware that we have a long way to go in order to meet the goals of the World Summit and of other forums where children's issues have been discussed, in particular the World Conference on Education for All, held at Jomtien in 1990. Some actions taken in our country by Government agencies and by traditional partners such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and non-governmental organizations, as well as by churches and civil society, have contributed to our children's survival, as, we are proud to say, recent data have shown. Although it is small, some improvement has been recorded in the indicators of infant and maternal mortality thanks to the positive effects of endeavours to fight malaria and of national immunization programmes. The educational system has implemented a number of measures — such as literacy programmes for youth, especially teenage girls — to bring back into the system children who have dropped out of school to become street children.

The structural adjustment programme imposed on the country has had negative social effects. Despite external financial assistance, satisfying the population's basic needs remains difficult. An analysis of the population's living conditions confirms that 46 per cent live in poverty, of whom 35 per cent live in extreme poverty. It is important to note that one of the most vulnerable groups is women, particularly those who are the heads of families. Generally, they are very poor and must still support their children and elderly people. In Sao Tome and Principe, one third of families are supported by women. In the light of that situation, we are challenging ourselves to take a more dynamic and decisive stance to purge our society of these problems.

Issues related to food security, public health, clean water, electricity, endemic diseases such as sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, children's access to education school retention, illiteracy and all other aspects considered in the Plan of Action deserve our strongest commitment. This must be demonstrated not only in words but also by taking

specific action. Concerted action to establish a comprehensive programme for children's development cannot be successful if the needs of the family and of the community are not taken into consideration; it will require, at a minimum, the conditions necessary for the family's survival and well-being.

Under these circumstances, the Government cannot simply rely on its own institutional capacity to create and implement programmes to cope with children's problems; it must secure the cooperation of a variety of sectors, with investment not only at the national level, but also at the regional and international levels. On the other hand, it is also important to strengthen existing partnerships and to establish new ones.

In conclusion, I should like to assure all participants that Sao Tome and Principe will continue to strengthen its efforts to improve the situation of our children and to fulfil our commitment to implement all aspects of the Plan of Action.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Kumba Yalá, President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

President Yalá (*spoke in Portuguese; interpretation from French text provided by the delegation*): I have the honour, on behalf of Guinea-Bissau and its people, to address this special Assembly session devoted to the children of the entire world. I shall stress in particular problems and the challenges that concern my country's children, although we share the same concerns as those of the majority of United Nations Member States.

The fact that the subject of children and youth has justified a special session cannot be separated from the universal truth that children and youth, on the one hand, are the reasons that all States should strive for progress and social welfare and, on the other, provide the driving intellectual and moral force to ensure a better future for our peoples. In that regard, our immortal leader Amilcar Cabral said, "Children are the flowers of our struggle and the reason for our fight". For Guinea-Bissau's political leaders, Cabral's idea represents an enduring heritage that is the foundation of values such as dialogue, tolerance, non-violence and reconciliation.

Guinea-Bissau is aware of that, and thus it has undertaken and will always undertake concrete policies and actions to create favourable conditions for the balanced, healthy and progressive development of children at all levels. To that end, our authorities have ratified practically all international juridical instruments relative to children. In particular, we have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1989, and have taken all institutional and legislative measures for its implementation.

The creation of the Institute for Women and Children is one of the political measures the authorities have taken to give special consideration to children. Other important decisions include the adoption of a law mandating free, compulsory primary education, causing school attendance to rise from 41 per cent in 1999 to 61 per cent currently.

Improvements have been achieved in the indicators for access to safe drinking water, child malnutrition, infant mortality, education and health as reported in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey for Guinea-Bissau, thanks to the invaluable support of international organizations and development partners, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Rädda Barnen, the Children's Villages of SOS Kinderdorf International and Plan International. As I have said, the political measures taken by the authorities have had the crucial support of international organizations, development partners, UNICEF and Plan International, with tangible results for the health and education of our children, notwithstanding the tremendous financial difficulties and the scarcity of resources that we are experiencing.

Given the continued high rate of infant mortality despite the aforementioned progress — as well as the fact that malaria, measles, malnutrition and other childhood illnesses such as diarrhoea and respiratory infections are still a cause of great concern — we consider that the national efforts of the authorities are not sufficient. It is fundamental that there must be coordination not just of the ideas but, especially, of the resources of a global partnership in order to create a framework for equality and opportunities, bringing well-being to all corners of the global village.

Lastly, a correct understanding of globalization must never be one that in its assertions shies from seeking solutions for the repercussions of events occurring in the developed countries. We believe that globalization involves the mixture of the good and evil

that at all times characterizes the peoples and countries of all countries and continents, all longitudes and latitudes. There is no one who does not strive to ensure that good may overcome evil. It is therefore certain that the well-being of all peoples, particularly children, depends on a prosperous and truly global village.

We believe that values such as democracy, respect for fundamental human rights and good governance, which are required as benchmarks of bilateral and multilateral relations, especially between the North and the South, can be effectively fostered only if the international community agrees to treat the children of our countries as the focal point of investment and of assistance by the people and for the people.

Guinea-Bissau is convinced that the ongoing efforts to improve education and diagnostic and preventive health care, to combat poverty and to strengthen democracy, peace, stability and security will reflect positively in the human development indicators, lifting our country up from the 169th position it currently occupies.

As we have said before, we have made gigantic efforts, with the constant support of our bilateral and multilateral development partners, to adopt and to carry out all the programmes we have pledged to undertake under the various international agreements and conventions on children, as well as according to our own domestic policies. But owing to the precarious economic, financial and structural conditions our country suffers, we often lack the resources. Accordingly, we take this opportunity to appeal to the international community to mobilize significant financial and infrastructure resources of support so that we can deal with our social and economic concerns, particularly in the area of the development of our children and young people.

I am grateful for this opportunity. I would like to call on all to renounce the use of violence in resolving conflicts. Many of us here were 7 or 8 years old in the 1960s. We must fight to defend human rights and to put an end to suffering. Now we are grown people. We have knowledge because we have studied history, have seen the experiences of many countries around the world and have observed our colleagues live their lives. We therefore believe that fathers and mothers should join their efforts to avoid widespread human tragedy.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September in New York sought to justify a tragedy in the name of a political cause. Today's young people must strive to avert such tragedies. The world is eternal. We are merely transients passing through it. We must ensure that the Earth survives. Otherwise, future generations will find themselves in the same situation. We must leave behind a clear and well-defined legacy by overcoming the difficulties that we face in this life. That is the kind of legacy that the current generation must leave. We must renounce violence and concert our efforts. The wealth of humankind is inexhaustible. We have knowledge. We know where there are deposits of oil and of diamonds. Vast wealth exists on the Earth. We must make use of it because we do not know when our generation will end.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Teburoro Tito, President of the Republic of Kiribati.

President Tito: I bring very warm greetings from the Government, the children and the people of the Republic of Kiribati, in the central Pacific. In Kiribati, we say "*Kam na bane ni mauri*".

Allow me, on behalf of my delegation, to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to preside over the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session, as well as over this special session, and to assure you of our utmost support. I would also like to take this opportunity to extend our best wishes to the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, to all Secretariat staff, and, in particular, to the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Carol Bellamy, together with our renewed assurance of support and gratitude for their excellent stewardship of the United Nations and its various organs, including UNICEF.

Allow me also to express my sincere gratitude to the President, the Government and the people of the United States — our gracious host — for their hospitality and efficiency in providing us with the required protocol and security services. I would like to take this opportunity to once again convey our sympathy and condolences to the innocent victims of the events of 11 September. I salute the United States and, in particular, the citizens of New York, for their show of courage, tolerance and perseverance during such difficult times, which bears testimony to the unyielding strength of the noble values that United

States democracy upholds and defends, even at its darkest moment.

We are gathered here today to take stock of the progress that has been made towards achieving the objectives of the Convention on the Rights of Child and to reflect together, in response to the call of children, so that we can all help to make a world fit for children. This is also a time to revisit some of the fundamentals of the Convention in order to foster greater appreciation and understanding of the broad spectrum of traditions and cultures, as duly acknowledged by the various articles of the Convention, within which children are born, loved, cared for and educated in preparation for adulthood.

Children represent the best, the purest and the loveliest part of humanity in every family, village and society. Guided and influenced by our traditional beliefs blended with religious values, we in Kiribati celebrate every stage of child's development as a significant event and an essential part of the child's preparation for initiation into the adult world. The needs of the child always take precedence over all other needs.

Our attendance at this session therefore reflects the very high priority that we in Kiribati accord to children and our genuine commitment to the noble principles enshrined in the Convention. I am therefore grateful for this opportunity to gain so much inspiration from the wisdom of many who are here and also to interact and to share our stories of success and failure in our efforts to improve the well-being of children. While there is still a long way ahead of us, it is indeed very encouraging to learn from the various statements made at this session that, during its first decade of operation, the Convention has made a difference to the lives of millions of children around the globe.

It is also pleasing that the Convention has had a positive impact on the minds of national leaders, to the extent that many countries have made the necessary legislative, administrative and budgetary changes for the betterment of children. It is also very moving and very touching to hear the gentle voices of children foretelling the end of many of the miseries that have plagued the lives of children for decades. But it is rather sad — for me, at least — to hear that they are going to fight to bring an end to these evils if the leaders and the grown-ups do nothing to respond to their pleas. As good parents, we must fight for them and let them enjoy the fruit of our hard work so that they, in turn, will be able to do greater things for their children.

Making a world fit for children is, indeed, a very challenging theme for this session, given the many serious challenges being posed by international terrorism, globalization, HIV/AIDS, the highly unpredictable and untameable forces of world financial and commodity markets, the rapid evolution of communication technology and the environmental degradation and global warming that have misshaped the world to make it somewhat less secure and less conducive to the survival and development of children, particularly in the developing countries.

In Kiribati, the Government, working in partnership with parents, families, the island councils, the churches, various community-based and non-governmental organizations, development partners and, of course, UNICEF, is doing its very best, within its available resources, to improve the well-being of children as an essential part of its policy to improve the quality of life.

As part of the attempt to improve the social, physical and economic environment for children in Kiribati, the Government is fostering the revival of very important family and cultural values and investing more and more of its resources and money in health, education, sports and other child-related activities. But the Government's attempt to provide the best for its children is sometimes frustrated when the price of overseas goods and services needed for the health, education and well-being of children greatly increases, or when the income of farming and fishing families in the rural and subsistence sectors — where the majority of children live — is seriously affected because of highly volatile external markets.

To address this problem, Kiribati is working hard with other countries in the Pacific and Asia that are facing similar problems to develop a regional and international strategy to deal with such situations and to minimize the impact on our national children's programmes of these international trading and market forces. In that connection, Kiribati fully supports the proposal put forward last year by President Rene Harris of Nauru, as Chairman of the Pacific Islands Forum, that the Pacific should now be recognized by the United Nations as a distinct region so as to enable

Pacific States to contribute a unique Pacific strand to the global fabric of ideas and understanding.

All of this has implications for the structure of the global economy and trading systems and for the way in which they work; there is a need for those centuries-old structures and systems to be reformed and democratized in order to create a world fit for children. If these global structures and systems are not reformed, I personally believe that the Convention objectives will be difficult to achieve and that attaining the goals set out at the Millennium Summit will take a very long time, particularly in the context of developing countries.

Similarly, we believe it will be very difficult to achieve the targets set by the Convention to make a world fit for children if a culture of peace is not cultivated to combat the emerging culture of hate and evil; if countries are not prepared for the adverse impact of globalization and are unable to compete in the global marketplace; if HIV/AIDS is not brought under control; if land is not made available to the many landless families who live as squatters in towns and cities; if the future of many small low-lying atolls like Kiribati over the next 50 years or so depends on whether developed countries and other large emitters of greenhouse gases take the Kyoto Protocol seriously; if marine and other natural resources face the risk of being overexploited or contaminated, leaving little or nothing for people's livelihoods; and if past wrongs are not acknowledged and reconciled in friendly ways. These are essential prerequisites for lasting friendship and peace in the world.

Despite those challenges, I am pleased to brief this session on some of the progress that we in Kiribati have made in implementing the Convention's principles and objectives since we became a party to it in 1995. A long list of activities that my Government has undertaken in pursuance of the provisions of the Convention will be found in the printed text available in the General Assembly Hall. I should like to state briefly that we have complied fully with the articles relating to education and that we are in near-compliance with those relating to health. With regard to public awareness of and legislative work on children's rights, I am happy to report that Kiribati is making reasonable progress.

Indeed, our progress thus far in these areas is quite encouraging, despite the constraints and handicaps mentioned earlier. Our gratitude goes to the United Nations Children's Fund, to other United Nations agencies and to our many development partners for their support and assistance. We look forward to their continuing assistance in the unfinished tasks over the next decade in the important areas of health and nutrition, public awareness, education, sport and legal rights, among others.

As I said earlier, Kiribati is a nation where community roots and traditions are still strong. It is a country where children grow up in an environment of love and where the values of respect, responsibility and caring for and sharing with others are developed in children from a very young age. Parental control, guidance and discipline are very much an integral part of raising our children: we believe that they are essential to the interests of children, who may fall into bad habits if not guided or disciplined in appropriate ways. Upon reaching adulthood, children are also expected by custom to care for their parents and elders. There are no institutions for the elderly in Kiribati, because such institutions are alien to the culture of our people.

For that reason, Kiribati wishes to maintain a moderate and cautious approach in undertaking certain obligations spelled out in the Convention that would undermine our important cultural values, in particular with regard to the rights of the child, as defined in articles 12 to 16 and article 26 of the Convention. In relation to articles 24 and 28, I am pleased to advise members that, in view of the educational developments mentioned earlier, we are now confident of our financial capability and are considering withdrawing our reservations concerning them. As for article 26 — which relates the right of every child to benefit from social security, including social insurance — its implementation is beyond our means, and it would have a potentially divisive effect on the family, which we regard as the most natural niche for the child. We acknowledge that article 26 is a reflection of the culture of more affluent societies, and I feel it should not be imposed on countries that have cultures different from theirs.

The world has changed dramatically during the past few decades: it now seems less humane, less secure and more challenging for children than it was 50 or 60 years ago. The world has become very unbalanced in its development. On the one hand, it has accumulated an immeasurable amount of economic

wealth, while on the other, its social wealth in terms of moral goods and human values is almost exhausted, exemplifying what the President of Sri Lanka referred to in her statement as an age of extremes (see A/S.27/PV.1). I believe that the economically wealthy and socially poor world has tilted the balance a bit too far towards the physical and money side of the natural equilibrium, neglecting the human side. That imbalance — manifested in the lack of distribution of wealth and the lack of peace of mind — puts the world and all of humanity in a very precarious position. Indeed, a balancing counterweight is critically needed.

To that end, Kiribati decided to celebrate and welcome, on behalf of all humanity, the first dawn of the new millennium with traditional singing and dancing performed mainly by children. We deliberately chose the celebration's theme, world peace in harmony with nature, as a reminder that peace in the world must begin in the humble heart of every person who is prepared to recognize the existence of a greater nature with which a balance and harmony must constantly be sought.

Even as we speak, military conflicts and civil strife continue in various parts of the world. The merciless acts of terrorism and war that we witness with tear-filled eyes have brought home the message that a culture of hate and evil is in the making to replace the culture of love and peace that the great religions of the world have been promoting for hundreds or thousands of years, for which the United Nations was created 56 years ago and for which other noble institutions have been created. We may now ask: have those great religions and noble institutions failed, or have parents and families, present and past, neglected their good children? Have we, as political leaders, failed to cultivate the elements needed for a peaceful world?

Whatever the answer and whatever the cause, I believe the most important thing to do now is to act. We must arise and unite our wisdom and our forces. Strong political leadership is needed to break the circle of hate, upon which politicians like me are sometimes accused of capitalizing for personal gain or in order to win elections. That is what I call harmful politics, and we should do all we can to exclude it from our political life, for it does our societies and the world in which we live more harm than good.

I call on my political colleagues to join hands to make a world fit for children. That is our children's vision. Let us make it our commitment and our collective mission, and let us together build a better world for our children and for all humanity. May God bless the United Nations and the children of the world.

The President: We still have 55 speakers remaining on the list. So far this afternoon it has taken one hour and 10 minutes to hear five speakers. I should like to remind all speakers to observe strictly the five-minute time limit for their statements.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Dominador Kaiser Bazán, Vice-President of the Republic of Panama.

Mr. Kaiser Bazán (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): Since the 1990 World Summit for Children, Panama has made progress in developing significant social programmes such as those for providing sanitation and safe drinking water, increasing the scope of health programmes, reducing mother and infant mortality rates, providing greater access to basic education and reducing illiteracy.

However, the fragile, uncertain global economy and the oppressive weight of the foreign debt of developing countries threaten to limit significantly any possibility of further progress in this area. Equally serious, they make it difficult even to maintain what has already been achieved. This state of affairs obliges rich countries to pay more attention to those crying out for an adequate level of well-being and dignity.

The challenge that the new economic order imposes on Latin American countries requires a concerted regional and global effort to make progress systematically and effectively in employing the resources available for development.

As well, the technological gap between rich and poor countries is growing. It is therefore our task to narrow it. There is no doubt that difficult access to technological advances and to financing for innovative education systems limits young people's possibilities in entering the job market. Publicly available statistics indicate that the contribution of rich nations to universal education is approximately 2 per cent of their total contributions in all fields.

Despite this situation, in Panama, in responding to the great inspiration of our President Mireya Moscoso and in carrying out her governmental

programme, we are dedicating 40 per cent of social spending to human development. In this area, we have made significant progress in recent years. However, indicators of child and adolescent welfare still reflect considerable inequalities. This situation is a principal cause of early school-leaving in developing countries and tends to contribute to child labour, to increase the exposure of children and adolescents to abuse and to lead to the breakdown of their social values.

The Secretary-General, in his report of 4 May 2001 (A/S-27/3), with his acute sensitivity, called our attention to the fact that the growth of the global economy, new political freedoms and technological marvels have not stopped the perpetuation of humankind's ills, which are deadly to children: "the ills of unconquered poverty, unchecked disease, violence with impunity and increasingly obscene disparities in access to services and wealth" (*para. 48*).

The great deficiencies in the areas of justice for minors, social rehabilitation programmes, programmes for the disabled, the promotion of a child's right to an identity through birth registration, abuses such as the worst forms of child labour, the use of child soldiers and the existence of child refugees and, especially, sexually exploited children all demand our attention and our fulfilment of obligations under international conventions and national legislation.

In November 2000, Latin American Presidents held in Panama a successful day dedicated to the analysis of the situation of children and adolescents in our countries, exchanging very useful ideas allowing us to move from speeches to concrete proposals to strengthen our commitment to the region's children and adolescents. Previous to the summit, the Governments of Latin America, Spain and Portugal analysed each of the problems related to the well-being of children, enabling them to define policies and strategies to pursue. The result of the summit was the document entitled "Building equity from childhood and adolescence in Latin America".

Today my country possesses a system of process and impact indicators enabling us to identify, evaluate and monitor the progress made in complying with the commitments made at the World Summit for Children and at the tenth Ibero-American Summit. The indicators cover the areas of education, culture, science and technology, health and nutrition, housing, poverty, families, agriculture and the environment, the rights of children and adolescents, women, the economy, transportation, public administration and Government reform, among others.

The United Nations Children's Fund, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, in collaboration with the Secretariat for Ibero-American Cooperation, presented an evaluation of the situation of children and adolescents in Latin America. This was a highly valuable tool for planning long-term programmes for our children.

The work that lies ahead of us is enormously arduous and complex. A commitment to share responsibilities and the interdependency of the international community are therefore indispensable and, I would say, cannot be ignored. After almost 15 years of the process of structural changes that have shaped the development of our nations, we have seen that the individual capacity of a developing State is not sufficient to achieve sustained results.

The international community needs to reform its strategy and instruments to address poverty, hunger and unemployment so that a synergy can be created among dynamic productivity, social welfare and democratic institutions.

Addressing children's issues is urgent and cannot be postponed. I therefore call on the heads of State and the representatives of civil society gathered here to continue to strengthen our ties and our actions on the basis of social solidarity and the common good. Only this way will we be able to alleviate the desperation that leads to terrorism and to eliminate human suffering, while consolidating democracy, freedom and justice in our nations. Our development and future progress depend on our commitment to our children. Panama says "yes" for children.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Valerian Cristea, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr. Cristea (Moldova) (*spoke in Russian*): It is a great honour for me to address the Assembly and to convey to you, Mr. President, the best wishes of the President of the Republic of Moldova, and hopes for peace throughout the world. I would also like to thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Ms. Carol Bellamy, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and Ambassador Patricia Durrant, for

their contributions to the convening of this noble forum.

For three days, we have been gathering together to discuss an issue of overriding importance: the protection of our children. This problem is of particular significance for my country because, during the past 10 years, certain problems have emerged there that were hitherto unknown. These include the fact that some children are not receiving a complete education and that some are involved in drug abuse. Most significantly, for the first time, we are now seeing our children contract illnesses linked to the Chernobyl disaster — illnesses that have not been fully researched and studied.

These and other problems that we have been discussing for the past three days — problems such as those to which other countries have referred — are being given personal attention by the President of our Republic. His commitment is reflected in the fact that one fifth of our delegation to this forum consists of children.

The 1990 World Summit for Children provided an important impetus for the development and implementation of a wide-ranging policy aimed at the protection of children, and enabled positive results to be achieved in improving the lot of children. Unfortunately, however, as was noted both by the Secretary-General in his end-decade review (A/S-27/3) and by previous speakers, all the great expectations that were generated by that forum have not been completely fulfilled.

We should note here that many of the Summit goals concerning the survival and development of children, particular in the area of health care, nutrition and education, remain unrealized. The Republic of Moldova is paying particular attention to this special session, as we are confident that, in summarizing the results of efforts over the past 10 years, the international community will help to define not only the objectives in this area but also specific ways to resolve the problems.

Our delegation would like the draft plan of action to balance the interests of all groups of States, including countries with economies in transition — a group to which the Republic of Moldova belongs. We are also counting on the fact that the outcome document will support the initiative to expand international assistance to countries with economies in transition. The most recent programmes in that respect are aimed at improving the living conditions of children.

Our country, through consistent application of the provisions of the Declaration and Plan of Action of the 1990 World Summit, has been able to achieve a certain level of progress by implementing a number of programmes and projects aimed at improving the situation of children. Over the past few years, high standards in the immunization of children have been maintained; new medical norms have been introduced; and the secondary education system is now more effective than ever in helping to foster the creative abilities of children and adolescents.

The highest legislative body in my country is the parliament. Society is becoming increasingly aware of programmes aimed at children, and the Republic of Moldova has established a youth parliament and local children's councils, which are enabling young people to actively participate in the life of society. Acknowledging children's rights as an inalienable component of human rights is the objective of our national approach to the protection of the child and family and of our phased programme designed to protect the interests of the child. During our preparations for the special session, the Republic of Moldova also signed the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and supported the "Say yes for children" campaign, thereby contributing to strengthening cooperation between civil society and State organs.

The Republic of Moldova's ongoing transition from a planned economy to a market economy is, without doubt, limiting the ability of the State to achieve the objectives set out in the Summit Declaration and Plan of Action. The radical economic transformation that has taken place in the Republic of Moldova has required enormous social expenditure. The amount of the State budget allocated to children has therefore been significantly reduced, and the situation of the child and the family have, unfortunately, deteriorated. Financing goals in the State sector have led to restrictions on access by the population to free medical care and education, as well as to a decline in their quality. The restricted access that children have to medical care has led to an increase in the number of disabled children, who go without parental care more often than other children. Moreover, in the context of the difficulties that families

have to face, Moldova is encountering such problems as trafficking in children and women.

For a number of objective reasons, the Republic of Moldova, as a country with an economy in transition, is not in a position to resolve, on its own, all of its social problems, including those related to child health care, development and protection. In this difficult period, international cooperation for the protection of our children is extremely important. We are grateful to donor countries for their invaluable support, on a bilateral basis and through UNICEF. Cooperation with UNICEF in the Republic of Moldova has resulted in a high rate of child vaccination against polio and tuberculosis. We are currently working on programmes to include iodized salt in the diets of young people; to prevent trafficking in persons; and to protect them in other ways.

In conclusion, I should like to express our confidence that, thanks to the united efforts and actions of the Government, States Members of the United Nations, civil society and international organizations, as well as of all the other participants in this forum, the decisions that we have taken in the past, and those that we will be taking in a few hours' time, will be implemented. By taking concrete and specific actions, we must show children that we are determined to provide them with a better start on the road through life in terms of improving their primary education and their ability to fully participate in the life of society. From this rostrum, we have all said "Yes" to children; I appeal to the Assembly in saying that the time has come to take action.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Valentina Matvienko, Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation.

Ms. Matvienko (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Entering a new millennium under the banner of globalization, which is a source both of hope and of concern for mankind, the international community now bears a particular responsibility for the destinies of children throughout the world. We must unite our efforts even more effectively to improve the situation of children throughout the world, creating conditions conducive to their full and harmonious development, regardless of where they live.

The well-being of children must become the main criterion for social progress, since it is the children of today who will determine the shape of the world in the twenty-first century. For the international community, 2001 was a turning point. The tragic events of 11 September confronted mankind with new challenges, chief among them protecting the peace and ensuring the security of our children, who face the threat of terrorism. To respond to those new challenges, the international community has no alternative to wide cooperation among all States. Solidarity in the war on terrorism provides a unique opportunity to build a new system of international security under the aegis of the United Nations, on a solid basis of international law.

Less than 24 hours ago, in the Republic of Dagestan in Russia, a hideous act of terrorism took place. In the city of Kaspisk, during the celebration of Victory Day, which commemorates the allied victory in the Great Patriotic War, an explosion occurred that killed 41 people, including 17 children, according to initial reports. Such acts of savagery, brutality and violence cannot be justified. They can be stopped only through joint efforts, and we would very much like to believe that this session will help to unite the international community in its struggle against international terrorism and extremism.

The decade that has passed since the World Summit for Children has coincided with profound transformations in our State's political, social and economic systems. We are coordinating our efforts in line with the high-priority objectives set out in the final documents of the World Summit and with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They serve as guidelines for our national policy aimed at improving the situation of children.

Despite the difficulties that Russia is still experiencing today, the interests of our country's young citizens continue to be the focus of the attention of the President and of the Government of the Russian Federation. A presidential decree has proclaimed that the survival, protection and development of children are among our most important objectives. This year, for the first time in the modern history of Russia, the annual budget reflects expenditures for education that exceed those for national defence. Work is now being concluded on major areas of State social policy aimed at improving the situation of children in the Russian Federation, establishing objectives to resolve children's problems for the decade to come. The Russian Government has already approved urgent measures in that sphere.

At the same time, the enormous and historic changes that are taking place have posed new challenges to our country — in particular, maintaining children's living standards under the conditions of a transitional economy and given the need to devise and develop mechanisms to counteract new risks that children face: those of becoming homeless street children, of being orphaned and of being exposed to the spread of drugs and violence. Those problems are relevant for many other countries as well; thus they receive a great deal of attention in the draft outcome document. It is important that the document emphasize the need for the adoption of specific measures to support such children and the institutions that care for them, and that it emphasize the family's role in those areas. We would like to see that range of problems among the top priorities of the activities of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Russia greatly appreciates United Nations efforts to guarantee children's rights and it intends to continue to participate actively in international cooperation in that sphere. Each of the speakers at this special Assembly session has stated that children are of inestimable value and that their well-being is a guarantee of sustainable development for all mankind. It is thus no accident that many speakers have emphasized that such global forums as the recent International Conference on Financing for Development, held at Monterrey, and the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held at Johannesburg, are designed to solve problems that do not pertain directly to children but must ultimately serve their interests. If we wish to see the world develop in truly positive and sustainable ways, we are obliged to see to it that the results of such global forums serve, first and foremost, the needs of those who will continue life on this planet — our children.

This session's draft outcome document contains much that concerns the need to mobilize additional resources for children's well-being. In his statement at the opening meeting, Secretary-General Kofi Annan spoke persuasively of the need for capital investment in children's development as a binding prerequisite for building a better world. We believe that an additional source of financing for national and international children's programmes can and must be the resources of large private companies and corporations. Those companies, in collaboration with UNICEF, could contribute to raising a generation of intellectually developed and spiritually and physically sound young people. Such actions by private businesses would be fully in keeping with the Secretary-General's Global Compact initiative, which we consider extremely useful.

Finally, I should like to express our great appreciation for the active work of UNICEF, under the leadership of its Executive Director, Carol Bellamy, which not only has to a great extent ensured the success of this special session but, we believe, will also guarantee the implementation of relevant international commitments in the decade to come.

In the few minutes during which I have presented my short statement, thousands of new citizens of our planet have been born. Let us wish them a peaceful and happy childhood. May they never know need, hunger, war or violence.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Lidia Shuleva, Deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria.

Mrs. Shuleva (Bulgaria): It is a great honour for me to address this special session on children on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria. My country is an active partner of the international community in its efforts to create a better future for children all over the world. Bulgaria thus aligns itself with the statement of the European Union delivered earlier in this session. I am very happy and proud to be here and to reaffirm my country's support for United Nations activities on behalf of children.

In 1990, Bulgaria participated in the World Summit for Children, and it aligned itself with its outcome documents; the World Declaration and Plan of Action. The Government of Bulgaria shared the belief that a special policy on children was necessary to fulfil the commitments made at the Summit. Hence, my country was among the first Member States to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Later, Bulgaria became a party to the two Optional Protocols to the Convention.

Since submitting its initial report, and in conformity with the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Bulgarian Government has undertaken a number of legislative initiatives to comply appropriately with its obligations. In 2000 the National Assembly adopted the Child Protection Law establishing measures for the full

implementation of the rights of the child. An independent State child protection agency and municipal services for social assistance were established and entrusted with the realization of the national strategy and the national action plan on child protection. The main priority of the State child protection agency is to coordinate State policy in the field of child protection and to exercise comprehensive control of the implementation of the rights of the child. A month ago, the Government adopted a national programme entitled "The children of Bulgaria". It defines the commitments of State institutions for child protection and health.

We are aware that it is families and especially children that have to pay the social price for the transition to a market economy. Therefore, we are convinced that a well designed and active social policy is necessary to overcome the challenges. I would like to confirm the strong commitment of my Government to solving existing problems related to children in Bulgaria, despite all the challenges we are facing during our period of transition. I would like to specify some of the priorities we have set up.

One of my Government's main concerns is to translate into reality the right of every child to live in a family. This priority is laid down in the Government's political programme entitled "People are the wealth of Bulgaria". We hope to achieve our goal through a variety of projects aimed at reducing the number of children placed in institutions by supporting their families and relatives, by developing social services and by training social agents. Some of these projects are financed by donors and are implemented with the participation of foreign partners.

The fight against poverty is still a serious concern of my Government. We devote a great deal of effort to financial assistance for low-income families. Recently, a new law on family assistance for children was adopted in Bulgaria.

The isolation of disabled children is another serious problem which we are strongly committed to resolving. In this regard, legislative and practical measures aimed at facilitating the full integration of disabled children are on the social agenda of the Bulgarian Government.

I would also like to point out the successful cooperation between the Bulgarian Government and non-governmental organizations, especially with regard to vulnerable groups. It includes projects developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy related to education, the reintegration and desegregation of Roma children, the integration of disabled children, *et cetera*.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that my Government is determined to achieve the highest standards concerning the rights of the child in Bulgaria. That is an important element of the Bulgarian Government's policy towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

When we face the challenges related to children, we are fully aware that the common efforts of all United Nations Member States are needed in today's globalized world. We are convinced that more concerted and timely efforts are necessary to combat smoking, drug and alcohol use, HIV/AIDS, child trafficking and violence against children. Today, we are confronted with one of the greatest challenges of the modern world: combating terrorism. Therefore, we believe that only coordinated actions can protect our children.

Bulgaria reiterates its readiness to be fully involved in consolidated actions within the framework of the United Nations. We share the noble goal of creating a world fit for children. In this respect, I would like to affirm that we fully support the draft outcome document of the special session.

We believe that it is within the ability of the United Nations to successfully continue the fulfilment of its weighty responsibility to protect the rights of the child.

Oral presentations by the Co-chairpersons of the three round tables

The President: As announced earlier, the General Assembly, in accordance with resolution 55/276, will now hear oral summaries of the discussions in the round tables.

I first give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Nambar Enkhbayar, Prime Minister of Mongolia, Co-chairperson of round table 1, held on the afternoon of Wednesday, 8 May.

Mr. Enkhbayar (Co-chairperson of round table 1): It gives me great pleasure and honour to report to the Assembly on the results of round table 1 on the theme of the renewal of commitment and future actions for children in the next decade.

It was a great privilege for me and President Ion Iliescu of Romania to co-chair round table 1. The attendance and participation were impressive. Over 50 heads of State or Government and other dignitaries vested with broad powers to make a difference took an active part in the discussions, which lasted more than 4 hours and exceeded their time limit by over an hour. It is virtually impossible to report on that rich and thought-provoking debate in three minutes. Therefore, I would like to apologize if I exceed the time limit in order to usefully convey the message that came out of the round table.

The meeting started with statements made by Ms. Caroline Barebwoha of Uganda and Mr. Te Kerei Moka of New Zealand, who highlighted the feelings and views of many children of the world on a number of pressing issues. They both stressed the importance of education, especially for girls and for children from indigenous groups.

Many participants spoke of progress in their own countries in ensuring the right of all children to education. Of course, some countries have made greater progress than others, and progress has been less than satisfactory in some respects, as the Secretary-General made clear in his report, "We the children" (A/S-27/3).

Education is a basic human right and one of the keys to eradicating poverty. Speakers described laws that make primary education free and compulsory and, more important, spoke about how critical it is to ensure that the education be of high quality and that it take place in a safe and well-equipped environment and that teachers be well trained. It was widely recognized that quality pre-school education and early childhood development are fundamental to children's longer-term development, followed by quality primary and secondary education.

The lack of financial resources continues to hinder the development of quality education, as does a lack of equipment and trained personnel in many countries.

Many participants spoke of the importance of inter-regional and international cooperation to maximize limited resources and share experiences. In this regard, it was underlined that the United Nations Literacy Decade, to be launched in 2003, should provide an excellent opportunity for mobilizing additional resources for the purpose of eradicating illiteracy and promoting the development of quality education, as envisaged in the Millennium Development Goals.

Technology in education — especially computer literacy and access to the Internet — has emerged as a new priority. This will only grow in importance in the next decade. As was pointed out several times, however, in many countries, desks, infrastructure and even electricity are still lacking in schools.

Another important theme was children's health and survival. Many participants spoke of impressive achievements since 1990 in decreasing child and maternal mortality through immunization, primary health care and nutrition. However, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Brundtland, said that while there has been progress since 1990, it has not been enough. The world is still not reaching the children most in need of simple, inexpensive, life-saving treatments such as immunization and oral rehydration therapy, as well as safe delivery and basic hygiene practices.

Several participants also spoke about the importance of adequate food and nutrition for children's healthy development. The Executive Director of the World Food Programme, Mr. James Morris, stressed that a hungry child has no chance to learn and no chance to grow. In some countries, however, children face other challenges to their health, including diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Other problems facing children today include violence in schools, and drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse.

Many delegations stressed the importance of the family to children's development and well-being, including the need for interaction between young people and their elders, and for children to be raised in their own cultures, with respect for their traditions and for the natural environment. Moka, a young Maori, spoke of the daily battles of most indigenous people to maintain their language and traditions. He said, "To lose one's culture is to lose one's soul. A part of you dies".

It was said that even in wealthy countries there must be better distribution of resources to ensure that minorities do not lose their right to education. However, it was understood that learning about and respecting one's own culture should go together with learning about and respecting other cultures.

The threat of HIV/AIDS was mentioned again and again, with speakers citing continuing efforts to educate and mobilize young people against this disease through such initiatives as life-skills training, and to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Other important efforts involve care for children orphaned or made vulnerable by AIDS.

Another major threat to children is continued armed conflict. Participants were reminded of the hundreds of thousands of children who have never known peace, never been to school and never received any health care because of war and conflict. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Ruud Lubbers, spoke about the special challenges faced by refugee children, including detention and sexual abuse, and about the exploitation of refugee women and children. He also referred to the need for education for refugee children.

Mrs. Mary Robinson, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, underlined the importance of children's real participation, reminding participants of the message from the Children's Forum that they want a world fit for them. Many speakers described children's opinion polls and elections, as well as children's parliaments and other forums where their voices can be heard. One important forum is the network of ombudsmen, or child defenders, of which there are 17 in Europe.

Another important issue was the question of monitoring and assessing progress in implementing the goals of the special session. One important suggestion was to encourage regional peer reviews involving national leaders, who would meet periodically to assess progress made in fulfilling their commitments. Other participants stressed the need for region-specific data to allow for more accurate reporting, and of regional agendas concentrating on areas of specific interest.

The question of resources was raised many times, as was the importance of poverty eradication. Vast resources will be needed to achieve the targets of the special session, although resources are scarce and there is vast competition for funds. Some participants urged donors to increase resource allocations for development, including through debt cancellation. One valuable suggestion was to look again at the possibility of reducing military expenditures and using the dividend for children's health and education. As 15-year-old Caroline said, "There is a need to invest in us, the children ... we are the world's own destiny".

In conclusion, I would like, on behalf of my fellow Co-chairperson, to thank the substantive Secretariat for its assistance in making round table 1 useful and highly productive.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland, Co-chairperson of round table 2, held yesterday morning, Thursday, 9 May.

President Halonen (Co-chairperson of round table 2): On behalf of round table 2, and of my fellow Co-chairperson, I have the honour to present our report. I would like to start with the voices of the children themselves.

Marie-Claire Umuhoza from Rwanda said, "I am the voice of all the children who have suffered throughout the world ... you who are members of mankind — why have you let these things happen?"

Toukir Ahmed from Bangladesh said, "Give us, your children, a good today. We will, in turn, give you a good tomorrow".

The importance of listening to children and young people in a true inter-generational dialogue was one of the major themes of round table 2, and in our meeting, children made their voices heard. In addition to Marie-Claire and Toukir, the child delegates who opened the meeting, other young delegates told us of their concerns. I should like to continue to refer to the texts of the young ones for a little longer. Marie-Claire eloquently described the devastating effects of violence on her family and on her country. She said, "I am here without a father or mother ... no one to call me 'my child'. Call me your daughter. I need love".

Toukir spoke of the need to combat exploitation and abuse in a world where there is violence and cruelty, conflict and war — where children require special attention, especially against child trafficking and other forms of child abuse. The other young delegates stressed the importance of real participation by children and young people, as well as of the rights of refugee children, girls and indigenous children. They reminded us that the greatest challenge for adults is knowing what to do when we go home so as to translate our words into reality.

Equality was a major theme of that morning's discussion. Every child must have an equal opportunity to grow and develop, beginning with safe delivery and access to medical care and to education. Children in vulnerable groups, including refugees, ethnic minorities, immigrants, indigenous children and disabled children, need special care and attention. It was underlined in particular that not enough is being done for girls' education.

It was said at the round table that education and access to reproductive health services are rights, not privileges. Many participants stressed the importance of living up to existing international commitments and of not going backwards. One said that this forum cannot accept that children are negotiable. Another underlined the need for the leadership and high-level participation of developed and developing countries at events like the special session.

The issue of adequate resources was raised repeatedly. It was said that only five countries have met the target of allocating 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product to development assistance. It was also said that the rich world has to give more, but that such resources have to be used more effectively. There must be a genuine partnership between donors and programme countries, and, in addition to bilateral assistance programmes, there must be a global plan for children. Within countries, more resources must be allocated to children. Many speakers appealed for debt relief in favour of children and for fair access to markets.

At the round table, speakers stressed the special needs of Africa, which has been affected by poverty, conflict and disease. Malaria has affected Africa more than any other continent and Africa has been especially devastated by HIV/AIDS. The Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS said that, in southern Africa, a 15-year-old boy today has a 60-per-cent chance of contracting HIV and subsequently dying of AIDS. He also said that AIDS prevention and care must be integrated into all development, humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, stating that AIDS has to be part of everything we do because it is part of life. A number of speakers said that adolescents must not be denied their rights to reproductive health services in the face of this disease.

Following the statement by Marie-Claire, many participants spoke of the harm done to children by conflict and war. It was stressed that there must be early warning systems and that the United Nations has a role in preventing conflict. In addition to immediate relief, children affected by conflict require longer-term assistance and psychosocial care from specially trained teachers and caregivers, even after the media and the public have lost interest. In such situations, children must be asked about their views and feelings. One participant said that conflict often resulted in violations of children's right to health care because of a lack of access to affected areas. Another reminded the round table that man-made disasters were equally damaging to children's health and well-being.

The importance of education, especially for girls, was underlined by many speakers. The Deputy Director-General for Education of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization spoke on behalf of the members of the Education for All consortium, outlining progress made in terms of national plans and international developments, such as the Monterrey consensus and increased funding for education from the World Bank.

The exploitation of children, child trafficking and hazardous child labour were condemned by many speakers. Governments were urged to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography in order to ensure accountability for these crimes. The sexual abuse of children, which is a problem all over the world, requires greater cooperation with the police. The Director-General of the International Labour Organization said that 180 million children are involved in the worst forms of child labour. Many of them work because their parents are unable to earn enough. He said that today's global economy is not generating the jobs that their parents require in order to support their families, so children are forced to work.

Many speakers outlined measures their countries are taking to protect children's rights, including the designation of ombudspersons for children, the formation of children's parliaments and the development of national plans of action. Countries are also enacting national legislation and reforming juvenile justice systems to conform to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The latter is especially relevant in the light of new problems that have emerged, including violence in schools, drug addiction and drug trafficking. Because children require and

desire the love and affection of a family, many countries are moving away from institutions and working with communities and non-governmental organizations to support foster families for orphans and other children without families.

The importance of regional and international cooperation was stressed by several participants, who have organized networks and working groups and are sharing information, for example, to combat child trafficking and child pornography. This type of cooperation is also important for collecting data on children for monitoring and follow-up to international conferences, such as this special session. Participants said that follow-up to the special session should result not in more bureaucracy, but in real results. The sharing of best practices by the United Nations system would help to accelerate progress.

Two common threads of the debate were the need to generate resources and that economic development goes hand in hand with human development. The special session on children is part of a "cycle of virtue" which includes the International Conference on Financing for Development recently held in Monterrey, Mexico, and the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development to take place in Johannesburg, South Africa, later this year, as members know. The overriding priority of this cycle has been children and young people.

I end by thanking all the participants in our round table and the Secretariat in helping us to finish our work. I repeat: the most important thing is not only what we say here, but how we act when we are back home. That was the wish and request of the young ones.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Levy Mwanawasa, President of the Republic of Zambia and Co-Chairperson of round table 3, held this morning.

Mr. Mwanawasa (Co-chairperson of round table 3): The Co-Chairpersons of round table 3 were His Excellency Mr. Sher Bahadur Duba, Prime Minister of Nepal, and myself.

I want to start this report by quoting from the statements which were made by the two child representatives to the round table. The first one was Sara Mendic of Yugoslavia, who said, "Listen to what we have to say, because it will help you make the right decisions for us and with us". Then there was Ngenfat Yang of Suriname, who said, "We need you to believe in us and invest in us".

Those two child delegates set the tone for the round table discussion. Sara Mendic of Yugoslavia spoke about the need for education and schools that are fit for children, saying that poor quality schools "can make us study but they cannot make us learn". Ngenfat Yang of Suriname stressed the life-long toll of abuse and exploitation on children, asking participants to imagine the many children who are abused, who are sold and who do not have families to care for them, and asking, "where is their future?" Other young people joined the round table as part of their national delegations, speaking about violence in the home, drug abuse and the rights of indigenous children.

A number of themes arose throughout the discussion. The question of resources was perhaps the main theme, because adequate resources are so central to achieving the goal of a world fit for children. The round table heard many calls for meeting international targets for official development assistance and for increasing resources for programmes benefiting children and women. There was a call for good governance and for investment in people, as well as an affirmation that aid for children should not be subject to conditionalities. All participants agreed that the cycle of poverty must end if children are to have a good future. There were also calls for fairer trading systems and open markets, and for economic solutions that look at the realities of countries today.

HIV/AIDS is threatening the lives of children, especially in Africa, where the gains of the last 50 years have been lost in the last five to 10 years. In addition to drugs at reduced or preferential prices, countries need appropriate infrastructure, clinics, trained health workers, voluntary counselling, testing and even clean water. Mr. Kunio Waki, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, said that we have to trust young people and empower them with knowledge about reproductive health.

Many participants stressed the importance of paying special attention to the needs and rights of girls to adequate nutrition, education and protection from abuse and exploitation, especially given the dangers of HIV/AIDS. In many families, girls still do not go to

school because parents cannot afford fees for all their children, and so send only boys to school.

Education remains critical to children's development as productive and happy members of their societies, beginning with pre-school and through primary and secondary school. The particular importance of quality primary education was stressed, and there were calls for quality education that trains children for our changing world, teaching them new skills and about entrepreneurship, science and technology.

There must be adequately trained teachers. Access to computers and the Internet are critical for bridging the digital divide. Children must also learn about things that interest them and develop their creativity, as one of the young delegates pointed out. Children must learn tolerance and respect for others, and for the environment. They must be taught about their rights so they may, in turn, educate their families.

There were a number of comments about corporal punishment in schools, with some speakers saying it was accepted in their countries. Ngenfat Yang said that he had been hit and told that he was stupid. He also said that there should not be a "bossy" relationship between students and teachers. "Pay attention to our goals and don't put us down," he said. One participant said there should be positive disciplinary measures in place of corporal punishment.

The education of the child begins in the family, which ensures that children have a good start in life. Participants stressed the important role played by both mothers and fathers in the lives of their children. As one of the young speakers said, children have a right to live without violence in their homes. Several participants said their Governments had enacted legislation to protect children from abuse in their homes, but that it was also vital to teach and socialize police officers, children and families, and the rest of society to respect these laws. It was said that while the State had the main responsibility to protect rights, families, communities and non-governmental organizations also shared that responsibility. In some cases, families require financial or other support so they can send their children to school instead of to work.

Many participants spoke of the devastating effects of conflict on children. Conflict harms children physically: they are abducted as child soldiers and are maimed and mutilated, injured by landmines or wounded in combat. It also prevents them from receiving immunizations and other health services and halts their education. Conflict also harms children emotionally and mentally; children affected by conflict need special care and attention. Other participants spoke about other forms of exploitation of children, especially sexual exploitation and the recent Yokohama Declaration on that issue.

The young people all said that words must be followed by clear action. Many participants at the round table spoke of the need for legal mechanisms to match political commitments, and of the need to develop and implement national laws and judicial systems that reflect the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The importance of reaching minorities and marginalized children was stressed by several participants. Many countries have children's parliaments and other means for children to express themselves, including newspapers written by children for children.

Many participants, including the young delegates, emphasized the importance of agreeing on the final text of the draft outcome document so that when everyone returned home from New York, they would have something positive to build on. As one of the Co-chairpersons said in closing, the future would be too ghastly to contemplate if the world did not move forward from here.

Agenda items 8 and 9 (*continued*)

Review of the achievements in the implementation and results of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s

Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade

Draft resolution (A/S-27/L.1)

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Irene Ashira Assih, Minister for Social Affairs, Advancement of Women and Childhood Protection of Togo.

Mrs. Assih (Togo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to convey to all participants the cordial greetings of the President of the Republic of Togo, His Excellency Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadema, and of the Government and the people of Togo. I should also like, Mr. President, on behalf of the Togo delegation and on my own account, to express our satisfaction at the outstanding way in which you are conducting the work of this session.

Because it constitutes an additional milestone in the international community's continuing efforts to improve the condition of children throughout the world, this special session is of particular importance to the Government of Togo. Indeed, the constant increase in the number of children who fall victim to abuse of all kinds in many countries reflects the collapse of human values and the deterioration of cultural norms that have always preserved the family unit and the balance of societies.

That situation has led to the need to establish new mechanisms, to conform scrupulously to those envisaged in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, and to respect our religious and cultural values, which are the foundation of the family. It is therefore our duty to continue our efforts to protect all family members — in particular the children, who will become the women and men of tomorrow — by guaranteeing their rights and their dignity.

More than a decade after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the convening of the World Summit for Children, we are pleased to note that there has been significant progress in the advancement of children's rights. Nevertheless, major challenges remain to be met. Among those challenges are problems of high priority: the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the phenomenon of child soldiers, child labour, trafficking in children and, above all, the poverty which the world's leaders committed themselves, at the Millennium Summit, to reduce by half by 2015. In that regard, this session must enable us to identify major guidelines for more sustained action within a dynamic of increased cooperation among peoples.

Constantly concerned with improving children's lives, my country has undertaken a number of actions. In that regard, I would recall that Togo was the nineteenth country to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on 1 October 1990. Since then, despite the difficulties it has faced, my Government has taken specific measures on the national level with a view to ensuring the survival, protection and development of children.

From that perspective, and in order to ensure the Convention's smooth implementation, Togo has, inter alia, established, within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Advancement of Women, a department charged with childhood protection. A national committee for the protection and promotion of children, as well as a children's parliament — whose presiding officer, who is at my side, will be addressing the Assembly in a few moments — have also been established. Moreover, the Code for the Children of Togo has been brought into conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. All these activities are being conducted with the participation of children themselves and with the contribution of national and international non-governmental organizations that work side by side with the Government of Togo every day on behalf of children's well-being.

Before I conclude my remarks, we warmly congratulate the United Nations Children's Fund and the other partners that are helping us in our efforts to advance all the rights of children and to fight scourges such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, armed conflicts and their consequences, child labour and trafficking in children and the exploitation of children as soldiers — that is, to build a world fit for children.

I should now like to yield the floor to Fati Mabel Hoenouwawa, President of the junior parliament, so that participants can hear the voice of the children of Togo.

Ms. Hoenouwawa (Togo) (*spoke in French*): It is a great honour and a true pleasure for me to take the floor at this session on behalf of the children of Togo. Despite all my country's efforts for the protection and the advancement of childhood, children continue to be the victims of trafficking and child labour; of low school enrolment, especially among young girls; of the spread of HIV/AIDS; and of the poverty and destitution of many families, which give rise to juvenile delinquency.

We the children hope that this new alliance of partners committed to the defence and protection of children will constitute a real starting point for improving the situation of children in Togo and

throughout the world by building a world of peace and tolerance for a better future in which they can flourish.

Mr. Cristea (Republic of Moldova), Vice-President, took the Chair.

There is a phenomenon having a pernicious effect on children's well-being that requires attention: the economic sanctions imposed on certain countries, including my own. Because of those sanctions, the affected States have had difficulty in creating schools, in building clinics and hospitals and in buying medicines. The victims of all this are children, in particular the children of the poor. Thus the discrimination that UNICEF is fighting is being aggravated by the international community itself, which decides to impose such sanctions.

In expressing my thanks for this opportunity to speak at this session, I hope that in the coming years, there will be fewer unhappy children on the Earth.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Achmad Suyudi, Minister of Health of Indonesia.

Mr. Suyudi (Indonesia): It is indeed a distinct pleasure for me to congratulate Mr. Han Seung-soo on his election to the presidency of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, devoted to children. I am fully confident that, under his capable leadership, our deliberations on the survival, protection and development of children will be fruitful.

Let me extend our sincere appreciation to the United Nations Children's Fund for its tireless efforts to promote the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and for the cooperation and assistance it has rendered to many Governments, including my country, to promote improved living conditions for children.

While we fully recognize the accomplishments thus far, we are also very much aware of the magnitude of the work that lies ahead. Each year, millions of children are lost to disease and hunger, which are often readily preventable. This landmark session and the proposed outcome document, "A world fit for children", will undoubtedly bring a renewed commitment, mobilize support for a better future for all children and help us build a world fit for children.

As we begin the new millennium, chronic poverty has become the single greatest obstacle to a better and brighter future for every child. Indeed, children are the hardest hit, as poverty strikes at the core of their potential for development. The eradication of poverty must therefore be a key objective of development efforts.

Turning briefly to the situation in Indonesia, there is no question that even in the midst of our economic turmoil, Indonesia remains fully committed to the goals of the 1990 World Summit for Children and to the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Last year, to strengthen its commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of its children, Indonesia signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Over the past decade, the Indonesian Government has made a number of major policy adjustments. Among them, it has sought to sharpen the targeting of its development plans and programmes for realizing its urgent goals, particularly in the area of the health, nutrition, education and overall well-being of children, women and families. In fact, one such policy document on child protection law is being scrutinized at the moment by our parliament, which considers it one of its top priorities for the current parliamentary session.

In the recent past, our efforts have been hindered by the prolonged economic turmoil in our country. As a result, the poor spend a greater percentage of their income on food, thereby reducing the resources available for health, education and other critical services. Thus, unless measures are urgently taken, the threat of a lost generation of malnourished, unhealthy and poorly educated children could become a stark reality. To deal with poverty and related problems, as well as to respond to the economic crisis, the Government of Indonesia is now implementing various programmes and approaches under its social safety net programme. Such new programmes have been more comprehensive than in the past, which has helped to reduce the worst effects of the crisis on the poor. The social safety net programme covers food security, education, health, social welfare and income-generating programmes that are quickly and directly provided to intended recipients such as children, women, families, schools and health centres.

Indonesia takes pride in its progress in the area of health care. In the last decade alone, approximately 1.25 million village-based, integrated-service posts have been established, which all provide preventive maternal and child health care, nutrition information and services including family planning, throughout the country. Likewise, Indonesia has successfully reached a number of goals including its 1990 goal of universal child immunization. By 1999, safe and clean water was available to 67 per cent of all households in urban areas, along with the sanitation standards set by the World Health Organization.

On the issue of HIV/AIDS, the statistics for Indonesia are considered relatively low. Yet the danger of widespread infection has grown sharply with the increase of adolescent drug abusers. In facing this situation, Indonesia has established a national AIDS committee that focuses its efforts on minimizing the spread of infection through enhanced adolescent awareness of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS.

A number of strategies and activities have been conducted to improve the quality of education, especially at the primary and secondary levels. This is done through the nation's basic education for all and Education for All programmes. Particular efforts have also been carried out to eliminate the gender disparity in education. This is consistent with our objective of equality for all people, in all walks of life and across all age groups.

At the global level, child-related problems such as the eradication of poverty, the elimination of diseases, child labour and the need to control HIV/AIDS require collective, worthwhile efforts involving both the industrialized and developing countries. Therefore, international cooperation should continue and should be strengthened. In particular, donor countries should vigorously strive to reach the agreed official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product.

In conclusion, let me just add that we see the draft outcome document, "A world fit for children", as a comprehensive and action-oriented document that will renew our commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights and well-being of children. Indonesia, for its part, stands ready, and is fully committed to moving forward to improve the survival, protection and development of its children in line with the plan of action to be adopted by the special session. However, the financial crisis that still grips Indonesia may place constraints on the Government's efforts to fully implement the targets set in that document.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): The Assembly shall now hear a statement by Her Excellency Ms. Vilija Blinkevičiuté, Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania.

Ms. Blinkevičiuté (Lithuania): Let me, on behalf of the Lithuanian delegation, extend our warm greetings to all participants in this special session of the General Assembly. I would like to thank the Secretariat for organizing this tremendous event, the Secretary-General for his excellent and comprehensive report, "We the Children" (A/S-27/3), and Ambassador Patricia Durrant for her outstanding work.

I believe that the special session — which seeks to assess the experience gained and the lessons learned by the world's nations in the field of children's rights and to set further objectives for the next decade — is very important and significant. It is an important manifestation of the world's desperate wish and need to build a child-friendly twenty-first century for peoples of diverse nationalities, cultures and beliefs. I completely agree that the aim of every country and Government should be to build such a world together with the growing generation.

In my brief statement on Lithuania's 10 years of experience in the field of children's rights, I would like to emphasise that the restoration of Lithuania's independence almost coincided with the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Thus, the basic principles associated with children's rights as established in the Convention have become a part of the national policy of the democratic nation of Lithuania.

Having restored independence in a democratic way, Lithuanian society faced inevitable economic and social changes. The decade was marked by a series of reforms dealing with the country's economy, administration, Government, health care, education, social security, *et cetera*.

In the field of health care, child mortality has decreased during the past decade. Prenatal care has improved, and the State programme for immunization, which provides compulsory and accessible vaccination for infants, is being implemented.

The number of people infected with HIV/AIDS in Lithuania is not high, but we are worried that the increasing rate of drug addiction among teenagers and other young people will increase the risk of the spread of the epidemic.

I would like to point out that the education system is considered one of the Government's highest priorities. Girls and boys have equal educational opportunities from kindergarten through university. This is confirmed by the fact that almost all Lithuanians are literate and prepared for entering the labour market.

I completely agree with and support the point of view that the family is the main unit of society, and that it bears the biggest responsibility for our children's future and well-being. Acknowledging that a child's well-being is primarily associated with the well-being and security of his or her family, Lithuania, like many other countries Members of the United Nations, has adopted a poverty diminution strategy and programme, which provides for instruments to overcome this problem. In 2001, the Government of Lithuania adopted a long-term programme to develop employment opportunities. This programme aims to remove regional disparities in employment, thus diminishing poverty and raising the standard of living of families, while increasing the well-being of children.

In the field of foster care, Lithuania seeks to follow the basic principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, acting in the child's best interests. The foster-care system is being changed so that preventive measures, such as social work with families, are implemented as a priority. Priority is accorded to placing the child within a guardian's family, rather than institutionalizing him. Non-governmental organizations are taking an active part in these activities. Their practical experience of social work with families and children is greatly appreciated. The importance of the issue of the protection of children's rights in Lithuanian policy is demonstrated by the fact that in 2000 the Lithuanian parliament established the office of a children's rights ombudsman.

We acknowledge that we have achieved much in the field of the protection of the rights of children. But in my opinion, child welfare remains one of the most important aspects of State policy, and requires more attention.

Violence against children and their commercial or sexual exploitation are among the gravest violations of children's rights. This phenomenon is intolerable and unacceptable. The efforts of both national and international organizations are called for to protect children from violence of all kinds.

A national programme against the commercial and sexual exploitation of children has been adopted in Lithuania. The purpose of the programme is to create preventive instruments, both nationally and in the Baltic Sea region, in order to ensure that children do not fall victim to such crimes and to create a rehabilitation system for those who become victims.

I am glad to inform the Assembly that, in February this year, Lithuania signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. At the same time, Lithuania supports and speaks out in favour of the ratification of International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, and is itself prepared to ratify it.

The participation and initiatives of children and young people in resolving children's issues represents a very significant contribution to our country's national policy. It is my great pleasure to say that a schoolchildren's parliament has been established and is operational in Lithuania. Members are democratically elected by schoolchildren themselves. Its activities have shown that schoolchildren are seriously determined to represent the interests of children and youth.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that Lithuania is prepared to take part in international initiatives aimed at achieving a better future for children, and to do so with, and for, children.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): I give the floor to His Excellency The Right Honourable John Denham, M.P., Minister for Children and Young People of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Denham (United Kingdom): Action to abolish child poverty is essential to improve children's lives today, to enable children to reach their full potential as adults and to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

Achieving the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals is vital, and we have a real concern that the proposed 2010 interim targets in the draft outcomes document are not sufficiently ambitious. We must aim to reduce infant mortality and under-5 mortality by more than one third by 2010 if we are to succeed in reducing it by two thirds by 2015. We must aim to reduce maternal mortality by more than one third by 2010 if we are to succeed in reducing it by three quarters by 2015.

As our Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, proposed in New York today, we need a new development compact in which no country genuinely committed to good governance, poverty reduction and economic development should be denied the chance to achieve the 2015 goals through lack of resources.

We have been far too slow in advancing towards our education goals. We believe that the richest countries should back the new World Bank initiative with the funds it now needs to fast-track our commitment to meeting the goal of primary education for all by 2015.

Recognizing that half of all child deaths result from four avoidable diseases, the British Government believes that just as we fast-track investments in education for countries that have a plan, so too for health we should fast-track support to help build universal and equitable health-care systems.

Furthermore, because we must build a virtuous circle of debt relief, poverty reduction and sustainable development for the long term, our Government also proposes that we step up our commitment to making the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative a success.

We also need to maintain the global consensus reached at the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development and at the Beijing World Conference on Women. Those conferences highlighted the need for sustained action to achieve greater equality for women; the importance of ensuring access to quality reproductive and sexual health services; and the right of individuals, including young people, to enjoy the highest attainable standards of sexual and reproductive health. All of these are vital if we are to tackle HIV/AIDS. In this, and in all work towards the Millennium Development Goals, the Convention on the Rights of the Child serves as an inspiration. The way to ensure children's well-being is to take full account of their rights. We believe that the draft outcome document for this special session — still under negotiation — should recognize the importance of those issues.

Tackling child poverty is also a priority for domestic action. In the mid 1990s, the United Kingdom had the highest rate of relative child poverty in Europe. Our commitment is to halve child poverty by 2010 and to eradicate it within a generation. By tax and benefit changes and by investing in services for children, we are on course to reach our targets. But there is much more to be done. We are targeting our efforts towards improving the position of the most vulnerable families.

Young people's participation in this session has brought a sense of both reality and ambition to the many debates. We must hear their voice at the national as well as the international level. We are restructuring the machinery of Government in the United Kingdom to put the interests and voices of children and young people at the heart of policies and services. As Minister for Young People, my task is to make sure that children and young people's voices can shape the priorities and practices of Government and to bring together Government, the voluntary sector, business, local communities and families with a common vision for young people.

Our society, like a number of others around the world and particularly in Europe, is increasingly racially, ethnically and culturally diverse as a result of planned and unplanned immigration, asylum and populations arriving as a result of poverty and conflict. For our whole society, and for our young people in particular, we have to find ways of building societies which share a common vision and common values, yet respect diversity. This is essential if we are to resist effectively those who want to exploit racism and xenophobia. The United Kingdom Government wants to work with others who have been successful in meeting these challenges in finding the most effective way we and other countries should respond. Nationally as well as internationally, young people must be at the centre of our efforts to bring communities together and to develop shared values which bind people together and which recognize the value of diversity.

The measure of the success of this conference will be the extent to which the lives of children are improved. That is the only measure of our success.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Atsuko Toyama, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan.

Mrs. Toyama (Japan): It is my great pleasure to speak for our children here today as a representative of the Government of Japan.

I believe that the United Nations was right to choose children as the theme for this special session at the dawn of the twenty-first century. This choice reflects our strong will and desire to start the new century with the work of laying the foundation for a better world for children. If adults were sincerely working to build a society conducive to the well-being of children, the world would be a better place. In reality, however, children are often deprived of happiness. This may be the result of political unrest, armed conflict, poverty or just of adults pursuing their own interests.

I believe that we should take this occasion to seriously consider what we can do for the world's children and make genuine progress. The future is on the shoulders of children. Creating a world fit for children, therefore, will contribute to the future of all humankind. Whether in developed or developing countries, we as adults have a moral duty and political responsibility to do our best for children. Developed countries especially have a significant role to play, since considerable resources are needed in this endeavour.

Japan has made every effort to promote the well-being of children, especially in the four priority areas of this special session: education; protection against abuse, exploitation and violence; health; and HIV/AIDS.

First, access to education is the right of all children. Education develops their potential and enables them to overcome poverty and hardship. It also contributes to cultivating global citizens. It is especially important to ensure equal access to education for girls. Education was the cornerstone of Japan's nation-building and post-war reconstruction. I believe that this experience could be a model for nation-building efforts in other parts of the world. Japan will promote cooperation on education with what I might call "the Japanese spirit", that is, through earnest good will without prejudice or dogmatism, making use of the experience of our educators, while considering the cultural and historical backgrounds of the countries concerned.

Uninterrupted education, even in conflict-ridden areas, should be provided to children. I met with Mr. Amin, the Minister of Education of the Interim Administration of Afghanistan, last month to discuss support we might provide in the field of education. Our discussion renewed my conviction that reopening schools and normalizing education is essential for the sustainable peace and reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Secondly, I would like to emphasize that the exploitation of children is the exploitation of humankind itself. Last December, the Government of Japan, together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and two international non-governmental organizations, hosted in Yokohama the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, which is now widely known as the Yokohama Congress. Through the Yokohama Global Commitment 2001, the international community demonstrated its strong determination to take further action to eliminate the commercial sexual exploitation of children. We should now put the commitment we made in Yokohama into action.

Japan, for its part, has been making sincere efforts to tackle child abuse and child prostitution, which have become serious social problems in recent years. It enacted the Law for Punishing Acts related to child prostitution, child pornography and the protection of children in November 1999. The Child Abuse Prevention Law, which took effect in November 2000, promotes a comprehensive range of measures, from prevention of child abuse to the protection of child victims. In addition, Japan has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and the Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. I am happy to announce that today Japan signed the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Thirdly, access to basic health care is essential for the physical and mental well-being of children. Japan has long promoted cooperation in this area with developing countries. In the Okinawa Infectious Disease Initiative launched in 2000, Japan decided to allocate up to $3 billion over five years to support action against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria in

developing countries. Japan continues to play a leading role as the Vice-Chair of the Board of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and has pledged $200 million to the Fund. Furthermore, since 1993, Japan has contributed over $230 million to activities aimed at eradicating polio in cooperation with UNICEF. I am pleased that the Western Pacific area was declared polio-free in the year 2000.

Fully committed to the outcome of this special session, Japan will further support the world's children in cooperation with other Governments, international organizations and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, corporate entities and the media.

As the First Lady of the Republic of Korea mentioned in her statement (see A/S-27/PV.1), the International Federation of Association Football World Cup games, hosted by the Republic of Korea and Japan, will commence soon after this special session. The games will be dedicated to the well-being of the world's children. The Government of Japan promotes cooperation with civil society by supporting the projects of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local authorities and others in the area of basic human needs through grant assistance for grassroots projects and subsidies to NGO projects. Furthermore, my Government established the Children's Dream Fund last year for the purpose of supporting hands-on learning and reading groups.

Children are born into this world under unequal conditions. We must make a world where all children — who embody our hopes and dreams and who are our most precious asset — can freely develop their potential. I appeal to all gathered here: let us share our ideas and work together for children, the messengers of our future and the creators of that future.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Talal Mubarak Al Ayaar, Minister for Social Affairs and Labour, Minister for Electricity and Water of Kuwait.

Mr. Al Ayaar (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to say that it is my pleasure on behalf of the State of Kuwait to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Mr. Han Seung-soo on presiding over the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly devoted to children. I would also like to express my thanks to the Preparatory Committee and its Chairperson, Ambassador Patricia Durrant, for their preparation of this special session. My gratitude also goes to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for its constructive role in the preparations for this special session. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his detailed report (A/S-27/3) highlighting the achievements made in attaining the goals of the World Summit for Children. This is a unique opportunity to renew our determination to achieve what we have not been able to achieve over the past decade.

Children, in whose interests we are gathered today in this international forum, are our future and the real wealth of nations. We are here to follow up on the implementation of the goals of the 1990 World Summit for Children. As we take note of the progress and achievements, we must also review the problems that continue to hinder the attainment of our aspirations.

The majority of children the world over continue to suffer from poverty, exploitation and armed conflict. We must focus on several essential elements that, despite the obstacles they may pose, should not diminish our resolve. We call for urgent national and international priority to be given to the physical, social psychological and emotional growth of children. Children should begin their lives in a secure environment that enables them to live in emotional balance with a sound mind in a sound body and to enjoy social justice and access to education.

The State of Kuwait endorses the draft outcome document, entitled "A world fit for children", which is in line with lofty Islamic laws. We believe that families and households should be our focus, as they bear primary responsibility for children and provide them with care and protection. All of us must face up to the challenges confronting children through strategies involving all of a society's active and responsible actors.

While the security of children is threatened by many dangers, including armed conflict, substance abuse and other social ills, we must nevertheless be steadfast in our fight against disintegration and fear. Children constitute more than 50 per cent of Kuwait's population. The State of Kuwait has taken a number of steps to provide basic services for children.

First, a hign-level committee on the care of children and families has been established, encompassing both governmental and private entities. Secondly, health care, education and social and

psychological care and services are provided for children with special needs, such as the children of prisoners of war, martyrs, juveniles and abandoned children. This includes kindergartens, social clubs for children and special care for both disabled and highly talented children. Thirdly, numerous pioneering projects have been implemented, including a centre for children's culture and science and a centre for early intervention to prevent disabilities. Fourthly, many household and families benefit from State financial assistance. In addition, working women enjoy maternity leave and social security benefits.

The State of Kuwait deeply sympathizes with the tragedy of the many children throughout the world who for political or economic reasons, or because of the selfishness of certain rulers, continue to suffer. In that regard, we cannot ignore the plight of Palestinian children suffering under the practices of Israeli occupying forces, who use indiscriminate and brutal force to wreak havoc and destruction. Among the victims of the Israeli forces are children, who are the most vulnerable group in society. We call on the General Assembly to condemn Israeli practices and to call on Israel to end immediately all such practices and to protect all civilians, especially children.

At the same time, Iraq is preventing many Kuwaiti children from seeing their relatives. There are more than 600 Kuwaiti prisoners in Iraq, some of whom are children. I pray to God Almighty to crown with success the Assembly's efforts to make use of the laws and instruments of the United Nations to provide a life of dignity and security for children.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): I wish to remind the Assembly that more than 40 speakers remain on the list for this meeting. I would therefore ask all speakers to observe the five-minute rule. Otherwise we shall not be able to complete our meeting in the time allotted.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency The Honourable Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Minister for Women's Affairs and Child Welfare of Namibia.

Ms. Nandi-Ndaitwah (Namibia): I am addressing the Assembly on behalf of the President of the Republic of Namibia, Mr. Sam Nujoma, who is unable to be with us due to other, equally important national duties.

Allow me at the outset to congratulate Mr. Han Seung-soo on his unanimous election as President of the twenty-seventh special session on children. I am confident that he will lead the work of this session to a successful conclusion.

Allow me also to thank the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee and the other members of the Bureau for a job well done. Our sincere gratitude goes also to the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and to her team for their tireless efforts in, and continued commitment to, promoting the rights of children throughout the world.

My delegation commends the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report entitled "We the children", and end-decade review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children. The World Summit for Children took place in 1990, six months after Namibia's independence. Soon after that Summit, the President of the Republic of Namibia established an inter-ministerial committee which developed a national programme of action for children. Namibia has also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols.

The national programme of action for children focuses on the following: health care; nutrition and household food security; water and sanitation; early childhood development; basic education and literacy; and children in especially difficult circumstances.

Namibia's commitment to the national programme of action is reflected in the 46 per cent of the national budget that is allocated to social sectors such as health care, education, housing, water and sanitation.

After the introduction of the Global Movement for Children, Namibian members of Parliament held a one-day meeting to make their pledge to the Movement. They identified HIV/AIDS, education for every child, poverty reduction and investing in children as the first priorities in Namibia, thus directing our focus to the implementation of the Global Movement for Children.

Health care is a priority in Namibia. Since the introduction of primary health care, the incidence of diarrhoea in children under five as well as cases of respiratory infection have shown a significant decline over the years. Neonatal tetanus has been eliminated, and no case involving the polio virus has been reported

since 1995. Overall, access to health services is more than 80 per cent.

The nutrition programme introduced in 1991 continues to focus on the prevention and control of micronutrient deficiencies, such as iodine deficiency disorder; vitamin C deficiency; and iron deficiency anaemia. Over 80 per cent of households are using iodized salt.

The water and sanitation programmes developed in 1993 are being implemented. Currently, more than 98 per cent of the urban population and more than 66 per cent of the rural population have access to safe drinking water. Similarly, more than 50 per cent of the rural population and over 90 per cent of the urban population enjoy appropriate sanitation.

The Government encourages early-childhood development, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Child Welfare is working closely with parents and communities in this regard. The link between the Government and parents has led to the establishment of many registered early-childhood development centres all over the country.

Furthermore, primary education in Namibia is free and compulsory. Currently the enrolment rate is at 95 per cent, with no disparities between boys and girls. Repetition rates have also decreased substantially. The major challenge is to provide universal and sustainable quality education.

Mechanisms to protect and care for children in especially difficult circumstances are in place. Depending on the situation, some children are put up in places of safety, such as children's homes and shelters, while arrangements are being made to reintegrate them with their families.

Social grants are also given to children after their needs are assessed. The devastating impact of HIV/AIDS has increased the number of children living in difficult circumstances. It is estimated that there are over 80,000 orphans in Namibia as a result of HIV/AIDS. The Government is currently in the process of developing national guidelines on the care and protection of orphans. In its efforts to address the spread of HIV/AIDS, the Government has established the National AIDS Control Programme.

Children are further disadvantaged by many other social problems, such as widespread poverty and unemployment. The Namibian Government has therefore embarked on an extensive poverty-reduction programme to address those problems.

We all should commit ourselves to respect and uphold the rights of children. I wish to take this opportunity to remind this House, including the children who are present — and I am happy that these children, some of whom are from Namibia, are here today — that there are no rights without responsibilities. Therefore our children, too, have responsibilities and obligations, such as to study hard and to be responsible to themselves, their peers, their parents and the community at large.

In conclusion, let me reiterate once again my Government's commitment fully to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to put children first. It is the hope of my delegation that the final document of this session will serve the best interests of the children of the world. All of us must commit ourselves to its fullest implementation.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): I call on Her Excellency, Mrs. Ebamba Boboto, Minister for Social Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mrs. Boboto (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of Major General Joseph Kabila, President of the Republic, and on behalf of the children of the Congo, allow me to thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Mrs. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), for their outstanding contribution to the preparatory work for this session on children.

This meeting is being held almost one year after the date initially set because of the terrorist attacks — which my Government immediately condemned — that occurred on 11 September 2001, which plunged America and all of humankind into mourning.

Ten years after the historic World Summit for Children, considerable progress has been achieved in numerous areas, including the areas of health, education and participation. However, in his report entitled "We the Children" (A/S-27/3), the Secretary-General recalls the formidable challenges that we must still tackle to effectively implement the Plan of Action of the World Summit and to address new problems.

Today, key measures we must take for children fall in the following areas: providing them with a good

start in life; ensuring good basic education, giving all adolescents a chance to fully develop their potential and to actively participate in community life.

In many developing countries, and specifically in my country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the humanitarian situation has become alarming. In urban areas, poverty has expelled many children from the family home. Thus, many children are homeless and live without the protection or the love they should rightfully receive from their families. They are at the mercy of all classes of predators. The phenomenon of street children has taken root despite the traditionally strong, inclusive family structure of our society.

There is an urgent need to renew international commitments to place children first in order not to waste the world's most precious human resource and in order to construct a stable and productive society.

Children's problems are at the centre of the concerns of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That special attention has taken form in a legal and institutional framework that ensures children's rights. The legal framework includes the international legal instruments ratified by our country and the relevant provisions of national legislation that deal with numerous ongoing problems including violence, poverty and scourges such as AIDS and war.

Bearing in mind those important issues, the situation of Congolese children is very worrying. The poverty rampant among the majority of families denies our children access to basic social services.

With respect to health care for children, the situation is marked by a high infant mortality rate, currently 127 per 1,000 live births; generally poor vaccination coverage except in combating acute flaccid paralysis, for which the strategy of national vaccination days has led to an appreciable improvement; the prevalence of protein-energy malnutrition due to especially acute food insecurity. As well, in 2001, there were approximately 900,000 Congolese children under the age of 15 who had lost one or both parents due to HIV/AIDS, which reached a prevalence rate of nearly 15 per cent in some towns in our country.

With respect to education, since 1990, the primary school attendance rate has fallen constantly. Currently, the rate has stabilized at approximately 58 per cent.

With respect to child protection, the problem of street children, which did not exist previously in our society given the strong, inclusive nature of the family structure, has worsened over the last 10 years.

As well, one can observe throughout the world the grave consequences of the disregard for universally recognized values, particularly the daily tragedy lived by tens of millions of children, due to war. In this regard, we look forward to the entry into force on 1 July 2002 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, whose sixtieth instrument of ratification was deposited last 11 April. That treaty includes an important provision on the protection of the rights of the child by declaring the recruitment of children under the age of 15 in national armed forces to be a war crime.

Despite the prevailing situation of war, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has reacted positively to the recommendations of resolution 1261 (1999) of 25 August 1999, in which the Security Council urged States and all relevant parts of the United Nations system to intensify their efforts to ensure an end to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. For that reason, my country has acceded to the principle international instruments for the protection of the rights of the child, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 138 on the minimum age for admission to employment and its Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

It should also be stressed that the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Major General Joseph Kabila, was personally involved in this process by promulgating law 66 of 9 June 2000 to demobilize and reintegrate members of vulnerable groups found among combatants. He demonstrated his political will by creating the National Bureau for Demobilization and Reintegration, charged with carrying out and following up that legislation in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

I would like to stress here that my country no longer recruits children for its armed forces despite the fact that our aggressors continue the practice of the forced recruitment of our children in the regions of the country that they occupy, and of using them against us.

At the domestic level, the harmonization of all the aforementioned instruments with national legislation is under way. Soon, Congolese legislation will fully protect the rights of children. The draft law on the protection of the Congolese child has already been drawn up and is now only awaiting parliamentary approval before being promulgated by the head of State.

The war of aggression that has been raging in our country for four years now is not only responsible for the phenomenon of child soldiers. It has also caused brutal and tragic forced population displacements within the country's borders and has forced a great number of our compatriots into exile in neighbouring States. That population consists in its majority of women and children, which are the most vulnerable groups. According to recent estimates, the total number of displaced persons in our country is 2 million, while the number of refugees is estimated at approximately 332,000, not counting the number of orphaned children.

Despite the alarming situation I have just described, I must assure the international community that the situation of children remains at the centre of my Government's concerns. That special attention has resulted, first, in an institutional and legal framework that guarantees the rights of the child. Secondly, it has resulted in the implementation of multisectoral programmes for the survival, protection, development and participation of children, with the support of our international partners, in particular UNICEF and non-governmental organizations, particularly Save The Children.

Currently, significant efforts are being made to bring the actors back to the negotiating table to establish a lasting peace. A step towards that was the 19 April 2002 signing of the framework agreement, in Sun City, South Africa, for the consensual management of the transition. That agreement was signed by three quarters of the participants in the national dialogue provided for in the Lusaka Agreement. I call on the international community to support the Agreement for the rapid restoration of peace in our country; it is one of the principle conditions for ensuring a better future for our children. I also take advantage of this opportunity to invite all international actors present in the Assembly to spare no effort to persuade other parties to accede to Agreement for the total reunification of the national territory.

As I have said, my country has made a decisive step in enabling us to better say yes for children, by saying yes to peace. The Congolese people cherish peace, reconciliation, development and a better future for its children. And, as the President of the Republic, Major General Joseph Kabila has often said,

> "The Democratic Republic of the Congo intends to live in peace with its neighbours. The policy of good neighbourliness is one of the guiding principle of our foreign policy. Our children first need peace, then well-being, must come from our natural resources, which unfortunately continue to be subjected to pillaging by foreign armies. That is why my country is firmly committed to ensuring a better future for our children through the Global Movement for Children."

I now wish to underline that the Democratic Republic of the Congo supports the draft outcome document that the Assembly will adopt at the end of the special session. We are committed to taking all measures necessary to implement that document in the framework of our national plan of action, which we plan to draw up with the support of Congolese civil society and with the participation of children.

My delegation would like to express the hope that the Governments that are represented here today will work together to produce a common plan to achieve a world fit for children, based on the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

I would like to conclude by appealing to all of our international, regional and subregional partners to help us to carry out our programme to promote and protect the rights of the child, because we believe that the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is dependent on the well-being of its children and young people. By investing in children today we can ensure peace, stability, security, democracy and sustainable development tomorrow. Long live children, and long live international solidarity.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): I would like once again to refer representatives to the rules governing statements. I remind speakers that statements should last for no more than five minutes. There are three lights. A green light flashes at the beginning of the statement, and a yellow light flashes 30 seconds before the end of the statement. The red light means that time has expired. I hope that, in a spirit of cooperation, all representatives will observe that rule.

I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Samia Ahmed Mohamed, Minister for Social Welfare and Development of Sudan.

Ms. Mohamed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my privilege and my pleasure to address the Assembly on behalf of the President of the Republic of Sudan and the children of my country. I congratulate Mr. Han Seung-soo on his election to the presidency of the Assembly at this special session. We are confident that his wise leadership will lead to the success of the session. I am also pleased to extend our gratitude to Ambassador Patricia Durrant, Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, to the members of her office, and to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), for their important contributions to this special session.

While preparations were under way for the special session on children, which has been convened to assess their living conditions and to review the achievements that have been made in caring for them and safeguarding their welfare, the rights of children were being undermined and their innocence was being destroyed by the bullets of the Israeli occupation forces in Palestine, in a show of horrendous and atrocious oppression and persecution. Such attacks were being perpetrated against children and women in full view of the entire world.

All children have the same rights, and international law must apply to all, without exception. Only in that way can children be protected and human rights fully guaranteed. We therefore call for international protection to be provided to the Palestinian people and for the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions so as to guarantee the protection of the civilian population.

Children's rights have been high on the agenda since the 1990 World Summit for Children. They have received a great deal of attention from Governments, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, scholars and researchers. It is essential to develop the potential and abilities of children and to satisfy their basic needs in a secure family atmosphere, guaranteeing their welfare, providing them with knowledge and teaching them a sense of morality. States, guided by the earlier Plan of Action and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, have taken great steps forward. But many fundamental goals related to ensuring the welfare and guaranteeing the rights of children — goals of developing policies and strategies at the national, regional and international levels — have not been achieved.

The report of the Secretary-General on the end-decade review of the follow-up to the Children's Summit (A/S-27/3) refers to the many goals that have not been met. It refers in particular to the wide disparities among regions, particularly Africa, with regard to plans and priorities for implementing these programmes. An analysis of the situation of children in sub-Saharan Africa shows how goals have not been achieved, particularly in the field of vaccination and primary-school enrolment and with regard to the increase in deadly diseases such as malaria, diarrhoea, AIDS and tuberculosis. The suffering of children in the developing and least developed countries has continued — indeed, it has worsened — and we believe that in the coming decade it will deteriorate still further unless firm measures are taken. This will require renewed political will at the national and international level.

Although a limited number of developed countries have fulfilled their commitments, many have not met their internationally agreed obligations with regard to official development assistance to developing and least developed countries.

Armed conflicts must be brought to an end. Their root causes must be addressed, and special focus must be placed on peace and reconstruction if the endeavours of developing countries to implement their national action plans for children are to be properly supported. The international community should support the family unit as the basis of a sound and healthy society — one of psychological, mental and emotional equilibrium from which the child can benefit. There must be a true commitment to eradicate poverty in implementation of the relevant recommendations of international conferences, particularly the review conference of the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development. A serious attempt must be made

to cancel the debts of developing and least developed countries and to alleviate the grave consequences of debt servicing and structural adjustment programmes.

Because of our great concern for children, the Sudan was among the first States to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Sudan formulated a national programme of action to implement the Convention, and has made great strides in that regard, particularly with respect to child health and the elimination of endemic diseases and diseases resulting from malnutrition. It has embraced the principle of health insurance for students and cooperative medical care, and has reached the goals set for child vaccination.

In the framework of making education available to all, the State has put into practice education policies and programmes designed to build institutional capabilities, meet school needs, encourage child parliaments and associations and expand educational institutions to cover school-age children, as well as nomads and internally displaced persons, paying special attention to eliminating inequalities between boys and girls. A special department for girls' education has been set up. The State has also enacted the necessary legislation to ensure the rights of the child based on societal values and identity, which are steeped in the teachings of divine religious and in high morals. A national council for childcare has been set up. It is one of several State institutions that take care of children.

The State's interest in children's affairs extends to civil and local society. The Sudanese movement for children consists of more than 54 non-governmental organizations active in the field of children's rights and welfare, which help to provide services to children with special needs and to disseminate the culture of peace. Despite my Government's efforts over the past decade to implement the first plan of action, achieving the remaining objectives remains a daunting challenge to my country and other developing and least developed countries, particularly in Africa, because of the numerous obstacles they encounter, especially the broad increase in poverty, the slow pace of development and the heavy debt burden.

In this connection, the persistence of the war forced upon my country is a real stumbling block for all child-welfare programmes, owing to the recalcitrant refusal of the terrorist rebel movement to respond to our Government's recurrent calls for an unconditional ceasefire. Those programmes are based on our desire to reach out to children and to provide them with the services they need. From this important rostrum, we invite the international community to bring greater pressure to bear on the rebel movement to agree to a comprehensive ceasefire and to put an end to the suffering of citizens, especially children and women, in the outlying areas.

In fulfilling the Sudan's commitment to protecting children and safeguarding their welfare, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that, yesterday, the Sudan signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The atrocious exploitation of children as a result of their use by rebel movements and outlaw groups as soldiers and human shields requires the cooperation of the international community in ending the suffering of those children and in providing them with a decent living.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the unanimity with which the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been embraced proves States' awareness of the importance of children and of the need to secure their welfare. This should be an impetus for us all and a favourable opportunity to affirm our earnest and just political will to implement the programme of action to be adopted at this meeting with a view to ensuring the growth and well-being of children and the preservation of their rights.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Ana Dias Lourenzo, Minister of Planning of Angola.

Mrs. Lourenzo (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): In taking the floor, we have the honour of transmitting to you, Sir, on behalf of the Angolan delegation, our warmest greetings on your election to the presidency of this important special session of the General Assembly. We assure you of the full cooperation of the Angolan delegation during the session.

This session of the General Assembly is taking place as the world confronts complex social, political and economic conditions contributing to the already bleak and uncertain future for children. Conflicts are gradually spreading everywhere, undermining peace and international security. This context renews the responsibilities of the United Nations. As such, this

noble Organization should continue to devote its attention to this critical situation, particularly in Africa, where internal and border conflicts persistently hamper efforts to ensure a better quality of life for the people and, in particular, for our children.

The unleashing of the Angolan armed conflict immediately following the 1992 elections exacerbated the already bleak social conditions of Angolans. As a result, nearly 4 million internally displaced people, some 50,000 orphans of war, 100,000 children separated from their families and 100,000 disabled citizens depend on internal and international humanitarian assistance.

The percentage of children in the population of Angola is estimated at above 50 per cent and they therefore represent the country's potential for development in the coming decades. Recent estimates regarding delayed growth in children, low weight and emaciated children confirm that poor protein-caloric nutrition is one of the most serious problems affecting them. Indications are that the rates are higher in rural areas than in urban areas.

Additionally, the following statistics further illustrate the dramatic situation confronting Angola: a maternal mortality rate varying between 1,200 and 1,500 per 100,000 live births; an infant mortality rate of 250 per 1,000 for children under five; access to drinking water for only 54.1 per cent of the population; access to basic sanitation for only 59.1 per cent of the population; and access to pre-school education for only 6.6 per cent. Approximately 57 per cent of school-age children find themselves outside the education system, while nearly 2 million are subject to physical and emotional hardships, 1 million of whom have no special protection.

We note with deep concern the increasing number of children separated from their families in urban centres and exposed to risks ranging from early pregnancy to sexual and commercial exploitation leading to child prostitution.

Children are the primary resource of the Angolan nation. Their future will depend on protective and development actions that are being undertaken by the Government, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, religious organizations and civil society. In keeping with our commitments and the recommendations that emerged from the World Summit for Children, the Angolan Government created the National Institute for Children and hosted and promoted a workshop under the heading "Absolute Priorities for Children", in which stakeholders analysed such issues as basic education, health, nutrition, access to drinking water, sanitation and the condition of families and children living in difficult circumstances.

Furthermore, and in accordance with the rights of children, the Government of Angola has been implementing a number of initiatives aimed at securing the survival and development of children, which include a programme to find and reunite children with their biological families or substitutes; a national conference on the sexual and commercial exploitation of children that resulted in the approval of a national plan of action; a national conference on the exploitation of child labour; and the promotion and conducting of free child registration campaigns. The first took place in 1988, registering 80,000 children; the second began in 2001 and will end in December 2002. To date, 500,000 children have been registered. A juvenile judicial system has been created to protect and secure the rights of children, as well as their obligations under the law. A Children's Parliament was held in 2000. Children's programmes have been established, especially for early infancy development. Literacy and adult education campaigns have been promoted, while budgetary allocation to the social sector, currently representing 20 per cent, has been increased.

In accordance with Angola's pledge to eradicate poliomyelitis by the year 2005, more than 3 million children were vaccinated in 2001. The advent of peace is enabling the Government and its partners to reach a greater number of children, thereby contributing to the attainment of our objective. The Government of Angola has initiated the introduction of antiretroviral drugs to reduce the vertical mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS. It is expected that up to 70 per cent of children born from an infected mother will be disease-free.

Today Angola finds itself on the threshold of a new stage in its history. The Government of Angola thus continues to be engaged in the process of economic reform, in the fight against poverty and in the strengthening of democratic institutions. After four decades of debilitating war, we are now witnessing an improvement in the environment for the protection of children's rights. The Government of Angola recognizes children as a priority in the formulation of

its economic and social policies, and thus we protect and ensure their survival and development.

The Government of Angola undertakes this major commitment before the thousands of suffering children in my country. On behalf of the children of Angola, we appeal to the General Assembly and to the international community to take action in a gesture of solidarity with the children of Angola to support the maintenance of peace, national reconstruction and development, all of which represent fundamental necessities for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Children and of the recommendations that will emerge from this special session. In conclusion, the Angolan delegation would like to express its support for the adoption of the draft outcome document entitled "A world fit for children".

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by her Excellency Mrs. Shirley Gbujama, Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs of Sierra Leone.

Mrs. Gbujama (Sierra Leone): We have heard them before. They appear in various United Nations and other documents. Here are a few of them: "Put children first", "A good start for every child" and "First call for children". These are not mere slogans. They are principles that my delegation wholeheartedly endorses. So, let me begin with children.

With your permission, Mr. President, I would like to read the following short message to the child delegates attending this special session from His Excellency President Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone, who is unable to be present here today and whom I humbly represent.

> "Child delegates, this is your session. The heads of State or Government are here to support you and your right to a better future; your right to survival and happiness. We are here also to make a new pledge to work harder on the solemn commitments we made 12 years ago, before some of you were born, and to protect your rights and welfare and those of children everywhere. We are here because we still believe that your well-being requires political action at the highest level of every country."

At this special session of the General Assembly on children, I must pay tribute to the work of an agency that has been at the forefront of the effort to create a world fit for children. Beginning as an agency established to provide care and support to children in one corner of the globe more than half a century ago, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has become the foremost organization for the rights and well-being of children worldwide. We salute its Executive Director, Carol Bellamy, and the thousands of people in local and international organizations, as well as those in the private sector, who are working assiduously to create a world fit for children. UNICEF has identified 10 principles for improving the lives of children and adolescents worldwide. Those principles, in the view of my delegation, are crucial for developing our programmes for children in the next decade. One of them is that we must listen to children.

We in Sierra Leone have been trying to listen to our children. They have a children's forum, which they say should be their own centre for advocacy on such issues as child protection, drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, street children, the special needs of ex-combatants, peace and education. Indeed, we received inspiration for our statement today from a Sierra Leonean child who has articulated the plight, as well as the aspirations, of the approximately 2 million child survivors of a brutal rebel war in my country. We thank God that we have peace today.

As survivors one would have expected the children of Sierra Leone to highlight protecting children from war as the number-one objective on the list of 10 UNICEF principles listed in a worldwide poll in connection with this special session. Considering that thousands of Sierra Leonean children had been abducted, drugged, armed and forced to serve as combatants, and knowing that hundreds of their young sisters and brothers were victims of merciless and deliberate amputations, one would have expected the children of Sierra Leone to tell us that their primary objective is the need to protect children from war, violence and exploitation. Rather, we found out from listening that for the children of Sierra Leone the two most important objectives are the eradication of poverty and the need to invest in children.

Eleven years ago, we in Sierra Leone embarked on an ambitious national plan of action in that direction. Unfortunately, the prolonged rebel war compelled us to divert resources to emergency and related humanitarian programmes. Nevertheless, we take pride in the fact that the main targets and beneficiaries of the emergency programmes have been

children. The recent establishment of a national commission for war-affected children, whose executive director is here as part of our delegation to the special session, also attests to our determination to focus attention on this group of young people. In this connection, we acknowledge with gratitude the important role played by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ambassador Olara Otunnu, in setting up the commission. We have also already drafted a children's rights bill that will become the Magna Carta of children's rights in Sierra Leone.

Global statistics show an overall improvement in the health of children under 5 years of age. According to the Secretary-General's report "We the Children" (A/S-27/3), there has been a reduction in the number of deaths among children from diarrhoea, polio and other childhood illnesses. We are told that this year 3 million fewer children will die than did a decade ago; polio has been brought to the brink of eradication; and 90 million newborn babies will be protected each year from significant loss-of-hearing disability.

In a global context, we cannot afford to ignore those developments. In fact, we can pat ourselves on the back that we have done a good job. But, for us in Africa, we can only take note of these figures and the improving conditions because for us the statistics are much bleaker. The challenges identified in the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, especially for Africa, remain as daunting as they were some 11 years ago when heads of States met in the Assembly Hall.

The rebel war in Sierra Leone was the main inhibiting factor in our effort to meet the targets. This notwithstanding, we are convinced that Sierra Leone and other developing countries would have achieved much more for our children in the past decade if the international community had fulfilled its commitment — the commitment to assist us in reducing poverty by at least 5 per cent. Let us make no mistake about it. There is a direct linkage between poverty reduction and the protection of the rights and welfare of the child. Failure to meet the targets of poverty reduction programmes is reflected, and will always be reflected, in the status of our children.

At the Millennium Summit, from this very rostrum, President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah spoke of the need for the international community to adapt and equip itself to deal with the new manifestations of the perennial problems of human insecurity and underdevelopment. He suggested that action by the Security Council to address armed conflict must be followed by more innovative responses by our development partners, in particular the international financial and development institutions, with strategies that are essentially child-centred, if we are to put children first.

It is in that context that I take this opportunity, on behalf of the children of Sierra Leone and of all the children in the least developed countries, to renew the appeal for the cancellation and rescheduling of all debt, as applicable, for the sake of our children.

Let us remember that when we speak of funding the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative, we do so on behalf of our children; and that when we call upon developed countries that have not yet reached the target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product for overall official development assistance to intensify their efforts to achieve the agreed target, we do so in particular on behalf of our children.

We in Sierra Leone acknowledge that it is the primary responsibility of our country to set its own priorities and targets and to mobilize national resources for improving the livelihood of our people, including children. However, assistance from our international development and trading partners can make all the difference.

Finally, as my delegation sees it, it is not enough to listen to our children or to give them a voice at this special session, which is taking place in the largest multilateral forum in the world, or to promise them participation in all matters pertaining to their welfare. What matters most is that we actually translate our words into reality for our children. The special session is about action — action on behalf of our children.

We have been challenged. We cannot afford to disappoint them, those who will inherit this beautiful world. That is why my delegation is pleased that, following lengthy and intensive negotiations under the leadership of Ambassador Patricia Durrant of Jamaica, supported by the Permanent Representatives of Bangladesh and of Germany, we now have a Plan of Action that is appropriately named "A World Fit for Children" and that is ready for adoption at this session.

We pledge our commitment to every positive move in that direction and to every clause in that document.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Aitkul Samakova, Minister, Chairperson of the National Commission on Family and Women's Affairs of Kazakhstan.

Mrs. Samakova (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Russian*): The people of Kazakhstan were deeply shocked by the brutal acts of terrorism that occurred here in America last September, which deferred the special session for eight months. As frequently occurs as a result of acts of terrorism, the casualties included thousands of children, who lost their mothers and fathers. Among them was a 5-year-old girl from Kazakhstan, whose mother is still buried under the ruins of one of the towers.

Kazakhstan itself has been fighting the terrorist network in Afghanistan, and we support the actions now being taken to re-establish peace in that country. It is our hope that the children of Afghanistan will have a brighter future. In order for this to happen, the international community needs to focus its efforts on the economic rehabilitation of Afghanistan. Kazakhstan has already begun to lend assistance to that long-suffering country and will continue to help it.

Kazakhstan is a young State, but in the span of its 10 years of independence we have been able to carry out important economic and political reforms. We have now embarked on a course of successful socio-economic development. The European Union and the United States have recognized Kazakhstan as being a country with a market economy.

We have acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and we have ratified the two Optional Protocols to that Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. A draft national law on the rights of the child is before Parliament today; it is fully in accord with the requirements of those international instruments.

A special law has been passed on children's villages and youth housing, which are aimed at improving the situation of orphans. We will soon be passing a law on State support for children and adolescents with limited access to health care. A bill is also being drawn up on State youth policies in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Thus Kazakhstan now has an adequate legislative framework for the protection of the rights and interests of children.

In practical terms, a great deal is being done in Kazakhstan to create normal living conditions for children. We have a far-reaching network of medical institutions that provide top-notch medical assistance to pregnant minors pre- and post-natally.

With the support of the Asian Development Bank, we are also endeavouring to prevent anaemia and those illnesses connected to iodine deficiencies. We have set ourselves the task of producing iron-enriched flour for all bread and of iodizing all salt that is used for nutritional purposes.

Secondary education is free and compulsory for the entire population of our country. We have never had any hostilities or armed conflict, and our children have the opportunity to grow up in a safe environment in conditions of multi-ethnic concord. In this connection, it should be borne in mind that we have more than 100 different ethnic groups in our country. We believe that all of this is the result of the wise policies of our President, Mr. Nazarbaev.

The Government intends to draw up a national plan of action to improve the situation of children in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The basis for that plan will be the final document of this special session, which we fully support.

In Kazakhstan, preparations for this special session of the General Assembly were an undertaking of tremendous scope. Last year, the traditional lesson to be learned on 1 September was devoted to two subjects: the tenth anniversary of the independence of Kazakhstan and the campaign "Say Yes for Children". The media provided strong information-technology support for that undertaking. As a result, approximately 4 million teachers, students, parents and citizens said "Yes" for children. This represents almost a fourth of our country's inhabitants.

We have also been very actively involved in preparing the final document of this session and have made a number of proposals in that respect. For example, we proposed the incorporation into public education of special programmes that would help to prevent violence.

We believe that violence in society in all its forms and manifestations can be reduced by consistently and

systematically educating children in a spirit of non-violence. We believe that particular attention should be paid to gender-awareness education among children. From their very earliest years, girls and boys should know that they have not only equal rights but also equal opportunities. In that connection, we suggested an addition to the final document relating to the inclusion of gender programmes in the educational system. We in Kazakhstan have already elaborated our own special projects on gender education and the prevention of violence. As part of these projects, we have developed programmes, textbooks and teaching aids and have made recommendations for how they can be incorporated into the public education system.

We highly commend the contents of the draft outcome document, prepared under the guidance of UNICEF experts. We believe that it covers all the areas needed if we are to create a world fit for children. The draft outcome document maps out what needs to be done to improve the situation of children over the next 10 years. I appeal to all members to vote in favour of it. The document incorporates a number of ideas suggested raised by Kazakhstan in previous meetings, and we are very pleased that the experts listened to the proposals made by our country at that time.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the United Nations; UNICEF and its Executive Director, Ms. Carol Bellamy; and all those who participated in the successful preparations for and the convening of this far-reaching and extremely important special session.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Girlyn Miguel, Minister of Social Development, Ecclesiastical and Gender Affairs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Ms. Miguel (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): It is my privilege to represent the Government, the people and, especially, the children of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines at this special session on children.

In order for children to inhabit a world fit for them, we the adults must provide them with the basic necessities for a productive and rewarding life. It goes without saying that these include nutrition, health and education. We as a body must leave this session having made a disciplined effort to identify the structural and constitutional changes needed to undertake the reforms necessary for the achievement of our goals. At the international level, we need the creation of sound practical laws and other institutions to uphold the rights of the child. At the domestic level, we need to re-examine our laws, our social structures and our attitudes to ensure that we create a framework in which our children can thrive and excel, not merely exist.

We are aware of the horrifying statistics of children involved in armed conflict. These figures bring shame not only to those who use children as weapons of war, but also to us all. We are also painfully aware of the 10 million children who die every year from preventable diseases. Once again, this statistic produces universal shame and should hopefully bring renewed conviction for action to those countries that have the wherewithal to provide the medicine, clean water and other essentials to ensure that our children survive.

The three United Nations international conferences this year all have a direct and fundamental bearing on the welfare of our children. If they are implemented, the noble goals of the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development will reduce the level of world poverty in a significant way, thus ensuring that the world becomes a healthier and happier place for children. This session, which is now nearing its conclusion, will define what is necessary for the provision of a world fit for children. The next conference, the World Summit for Social Development, to be held in Johannesburg, will deal with environmental issues and will seek to reverse or limit some of the damage that we have done to the physical world which we bequeath to the children.

I hope that you will forgive me, Mr. President, if I concentrate on the progress that we have made in our tiny country in caring for and providing for our children. Notwithstanding our limited resources, we ensure that children have access to health care through a system of island-wide rural health clinics. We are concentrating fiercely on our educational system, and it is our hope and our promise that free education will be available to all our children up to school-leaving age within the next decade.

We are doing our utmost to create an environment that will attract foreign investment that, in conjunction with local industry and agriculture, will provide employment opportunities for our children. In order to achieve our goals, we need help — help from our age-old partners, like the churches, which play a pivotal role in our educational system, and from new, creative

and committed global entities. It is essential for us to be part of the global economy; only by creating favourable conditions for trade and investment will we succeed in this. We need the prosperous countries of the world to live up to their commitment to provide help to the poorer countries of the world.

It grieves me that one of my country's principal benefactors and friends, the Republic of China on Taiwan, is excluded from a global conference. The millions of Taiwanese children have the same basic rights as those in the rest of the world, and need our hand of fellowship.

During the course of this conference, we have heard millions of seemingly sincere words about what needs to be done for our children to enable them to live in a world fit for them. Let us hope that those were not just words, and that we will all leave here enriched, inspired and ennobled in our commitment to create a better world for our children. Let those of us who use children to wage war find it in our hearts to stop. Let those of us who abuse children — whether we be parents, clergy or strangers — cease. Let us hear the voices of our children, heed their words and remember that it is our responsibility to ensure that the future is not desecrated. Let us endeavour to see the future clearly and take urgent steps to protect our world and our children from future desecration.

Let me conclude by thanking all those who were instrumental in organizing this wonderful and pivotal event. It has been an honour for me to be here.

The President: I thank the Minister for Social Development, Ecclesiastical and Gender Affairs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for her cooperation in keeping to the time limit.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abdul Rahim Karimi, Minister of Justice of Afghanistan.

Mr. Karimi (Afghanistan) (*spoke in Dari; English text provided by the delegation*): I have the honour to read out a statement from His Excellency Mr. Hamid Karzai, Chairman of the Interim Administration of Afghanistan, who, despite his desire to attend this special session on children, was unable to be present due to urgent duties in Afghanistan.

> "The armed conflicts of the past 23 years have had a drastic impact on all segments of civilian society, in particular on the lives of Afghan children. Millions of Afghanistan's children are in dire need of medical treatment. One hundred thousand of them are engaged in hard labour under hazardous working conditions. The Assembly is well aware of the level of impact that armed conflict can have in harming children's lives.
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> "While the scope of the suffering of Afghan children is exceptionally great, we also bear in mind the entrenched challenges that affect children's lives throughout the world. We are aware that children suffer in various ways in many countries. We hope that this special session on children will result in the adoption of vital decisions for the protection and promotion of children's rights worldwide.
>
> "In that context, the interim administration of Afghanistan stands committed to deploy all possible efforts to achieve this objective. It is important to note that Afghanistan will not succeed in overcoming the daunting challenges that face its children unless we receive assistance from the international community, the United Nations and other organizations that deal with humanitarian issues. I should like to add that if Afghanistan had not been not liberated from the domination of terrorists and fundamentalists, no Afghan child would be ready to enrol in school; rather, Afghan children could have been trained to serve terrorism and to become arch-enemies of their own country instead of serving their people.
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> "I should like to take this opportunity to convey, on behalf of the Afghan children, our deepest gratitude to the children — and their families — who expressed their solidarity by offering a small part of their minimal assets to the children of Afghanistan.
>
> "In conclusion, I should like to reiterate my best wishes for the success of this gathering and my best wishes to those who have taken practical measures aimed at enhancing the well-being of children throughout the world."

I shall now read my own statement on this special session on children.

The protection of children's rights remains a fundamental responsibility of the human community, requiring that children be raised in a healthy environment that ensures their spiritual and physical

well-being. With much regret, I must state that many negative changes in our country as a result of two and a half decades of armed conflict have had drastic impacts on the upbringing, training and education of the next generation.

In Afghanistan, there exists a generation of children who have been brought up in an atmosphere of armed conflict, deprived of education, recreational facilities and medical care. After witnessing the death of their loved ones and the loss of their material and moral assets, children have fallen victim to various psychological illnesses. Moreover, they have been forced to accept jobs that require hard labour and, in some instances, to perform military tasks in order to feed themselves. As we are all aware, finding remedies to such problems will be no easy task. It will therefore be a fundamental responsibility of every member of human society to attract the attention of the world's leaders to finding solutions to these major problems.

Today, our children do not have adequate medical care. The ground is not prepared for recreational facilities. Thousands of children who are eligible to attend educational institutions are unable to pursue a decent level of education. There are not enough schools or teaching facilities. In some cases, children are too old to qualify for admission to primary schools. Hence, it is vital that adult teaching centres providing literacy courses be opened.

In addition, infant feeding centres are non-existent. We have no nurseries to provide care to children under the age of seven. There are not enough professional teachers to provide education in vocational institutions. Educational standards are extremely low.

In order to prevent further privation of children — many of whom have lost their parents and have no guardians — we must take the necessary measures to ensure that they are cared for. Many such children wander in cities, accepting jobs as paid trainees. Furthermore, efforts must be undertaken to provide vocational training for those who missed the opportunity to attend school and were forced to resort to accepting military duties. Opportunities must be provided so that children can disassociate themselves from weaponry. Those who continue to suffer from various psychological illnesses as a result of the destructive war must receive treatment.

Nationwide training and education must be provided for all children. Above all, children who commit crimes must be kept in training centres, where they should receive training that will enable them to become responsible members of society. At the moment, no such centre is available. We have been unable to provide training facilities, medical care or housing for these children. Currently, they are being housed in locations next to the quarters of adult criminals. Despite the fact that, on several occasions, we have raised this issue with the authorities and the officials of the United Nations, we have yet to see any results. Nevertheless, we will continue in our efforts to resolve these problems in our country.

I should also like to mention that, after the collapse of the terrorist and anti-national regime of the Taliban, and following the establishment of the Afghan Interim Administration, we have accomplished many useful tasks. Many schools have been opened in Kabul city and in other provinces, where a great number of children are continuing their education. The total number of children who are attending various schools has reached 2.01 million. The number of female students attending school has reached 673,000. In addition, orphan centres have been reopened in Kabul city and in other provinces. Those centres provide housing and care for many orphans in dire need. In Kabul alone, 1,300 orphans, including 120 girls, are registered in homes for orphans. Two hundred additional orphans have been registered in Herat, Logar, Kapisa, Badakhshan and other provinces. However, despite such progress, many other orphans throughout the country remain unregistered.

The Interim Administration has also undertaken initiatives to prevent the employment of children in the military sector. In addition, measures have been taken to decrease hard labour for children as much as possible. However, much more can and should be done. It is only with the international community's assistance that we can have further success with respect to children's lives.

In conclusion, I wish a prosperous future for all children, who are the future of our countries.

The President: Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I strongly urge all speakers to cooperate by strictly observing the five-minute time limit in making their statements.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gabriel Riveros, Minister of Public Health of Colombia.

Mr. Riveros (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I should like to congratulate Ambassador Patricia Durrant, Permanent Representative of Jamaica, on the preparation of this session. I should also like to thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Carol Bellamy, for their intensive work.

Tomorrow is too late for the children of the world. In developing countries, the majority of children are poor and, what is worse, the majority of the poor are children. They are particularly exposed to a series of violations of their rights because they lack adequate systems of protection and defence; this has a grave impact on their future. High levels of poverty and unemployment commonly lead to the break-up of the family unit, to an increase in domestic violence, to labour exploitation, to sexual abuse and exploitation, and to abandonment.

Colombia, too, suffers from the effects of an armed conflict linked to the global problem of illicit drugs, which has a negative impact on our children's living conditions, in particular with regard to health and education. Those most directly affected are child soldiers, the victims of narco-terrorism, the victims of armed actions and abductions, and displaced children and orphans. That increases the risk that the process of development and of the accumulation of human and social capital will be disrupted. Indirectly, the cost of the conflict affects public investment and social spending, which in turn affects the development of all children, especially those from low-income families.

However, the impact of that situation has been mitigated, since spending for health, education and nutrition is protected by law and by the parafiscal origin of resources that finance the programmes of the national family-welfare system. That has caused social spending in our country to constitute approximately 13 per cent of the gross national product, nearly double what it was in 199[illegible] is due to a great effort during a very severe process of fiscal adjustment.

With the purpose of creating conditions that would guarantee children's access to goods and social services, the national Government designed and implemented a set of comprehensive measures and reforms so that the economy would return to stable growth. In addition, a series of mechanisms to protect and focus social spending were implemented, supported by structural reforms in the redistribution of resources. Such public intervention is aimed at eradicating poverty and at protecting vulnerable groups. To achieve greater efficiency in structural health and education spending through the social security system, we have created incentives to reduce the school dropout rate, to discourage child labour and to provide adequate nutrition for minors, monitoring their weight and height, among other activities.

Over the next 10 years, we must make this a world within the reach of children, with the help of the outcome document to be adopted at this second "world summit for children". Our challenge as adults is to ensure that our children are healthier and better educated so that they will achieve better results than we, the adults of today, have achieved.

For our part, Colombia's commitment with and for children, led by the President of the Republic and the first lady of the nation, is based on the recognition of the central role of children as the fruits of society, as the citizens of the future and as the builders of a better tomorrow. The obligation of today's adults is to build a more loving and humane Colombia, with the help of those children. The challenge, then, is to build a public policy as a collective effort, heeding the Colombian constitutional precept that those responsible for promoting and defending children's rights are the family, society and the State. Such a public policy should focus national efforts on the building of human and material wealth in an equitable way, not on its accumulation for the benefit of limited groups.

Promoting children's rights also means truly carrying out activities of monitoring and evaluation. We have proceeded to identify each of the rights of the child — understood as property of the individual and as assets of value to society — so that they can be measured, planned and evaluated. When we review national reports on fulfilment of the 1990 goals, we find that there have been substantial advances, although in some cases the goals have not been reached. This teaches us that, in order to set long-term goals, it is imperative that the mechanisms and strategies established must be accompanied by methodologies of evaluation and monitoring to measure the degree of compliance with commitments in a systematic and continuous process.

Placing Colombia within the reach of children means immediately fulfilling each commitments that we will make at this special session, as a collective effort of our entire society and as a duty of the State as guarantor of their implementation. Let me reiterate: tomorrow is too late for the children of the world.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Luis Alfonso Dávila, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Venezuela.

Mr. Dávila (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Let me begin by reading out a poem by Creole author Andrés Eloy Blanco:

"When one bears a child,

One must think of the child safe at home and the child in the street,

The child carried on the back of a poor woman

The child in the carriage pushed by the English governess,

The white child carried by the Creole woman,

The white child carried by the black woman,

The Indian child carried by the Indian woman,

And the black child carried by the earth."

With brilliance and sensitivity, Andrés Eloy Blanco expresses the feelings inspired not just by one or two children but by all children throughout the world.

Venezuela welcomes the convening of this special session as an opportunity not only to assess the actions taken and the achievements registered since 1990, but also to build a better future for the children of the world. Venezuela ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 13 September 1990, and, in so doing, committed to complying with its provisions.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is in the process of charting its own course, which, being peaceful and democratic, has attracted the attention of the international community. Therefore Venezuela can now, from this lofty rostrum, speak with great pride of some of its concrete achievements: a legal framework, our Bolivarian Constitution; the constitutional law for the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents, whose purpose is to comply with the provisions of the Convention. With this extremely modern law, we have created the National Protection System, which is made up of key children's organizations and constitutes a national network covering Venezuela's 24 states and 334 townships.

Venezuela, as a participatory democracy, consulted children and adolescents in assessing the annual Operative Plan in this area, in order to incorporate their observations. That initiative was part of the process of expanding the social rights enshrined in the national Constitution, which is divided into four major categories: survival, development, protection and participation.

A group of Venezuelan children and adolescents is participating in this world summit. A few minutes ago, they asked me to appeal to those nations that have not signed the Convention to do so and to translate it into concrete action, as they have seen us do in Venezuela.

We would like to congratulate the Rio Group for its contributions to, and for its clear-sightedness in, the negotiations prior to and during the summit.

In Venezuela, investment devoted to children and infants rose from 2 per cent of the gross domestic product three years ago to 7 per cent today. That figure represents almost 25 per cent of the national budget. In the last three years, we have integrated 1.4 million children who had been excluded or who had dropped out of school.

By controlling macroeconomic variables, in particular inflation, we have managed to lift more than 1.5 million people — many of them children and adolescents — out of poverty. In that way we would like to end the perverse dynamic of poverty and crime.

We have created the Women's Bank, with which we assist unemployed women, granting them credit to undertake a new and productive economic activity. We have also created the People's Sovereign Bank. We have opened more than 2,500 Bolivarian schools so far; this year, their number will reach 3,000.

This reflects the concept of comprehensive care for schoolchildren and reaffirms the idea of a healthy, educated and well-fed child, one who is cared for while his or her parents are working. In addition, in three years we have also tripled teaching salaries. Education is and will be at the heart of a strategy designed to form the new Venezuelan citizen.

I should like to share with the Assembly the pride that I feel at seeing the 280 members of Venezuela's Youth and Children's Orchestra, the best of its kind in the world, here to perform tonight at the gala, at the request of the Secretary-General. This is but one facet of our broad social project. Indeed, the number of children participating in this musical programme has risen from 60,000 to 110,000.

In the area of health, we have reduced the infant mortality rate to 17 per 1,000. The world average is 57, and 63 in developing countries. Through networks devoted to promoting quality of life, we provide comprehensive care to 250,000 children in 19,000 day care centres. The goal for this year is to reach 300,000 children.

Through a programme called Friend of Children Hospital — which includes 18 hospitals throughout the country — we have increased the level of care for children under one year of age. The initial result is a drop of 10 per cent in the rate of infant mortality due to underdeveloped lungs.

We are also carrying out programmes to encourage breastfeeding. Today in Venezuela the State guarantees to its entire population free access to vaccines for children under 5 against preventable infectious diseases such as polio, measles, whooping cough, diphtheria, German measles, tuberculosis, hepatitis and meningitis, many of which have already been eradicated in Venezuela.

I do not want to bore the Assembly with figures and data, but I do want to say that all of these intentions, concrete plans and achievements were seriously threatened when, in recent days, a group of political outlaws carried out an assault on legitimate authority. This was an unprecedented event: a small elitist group with resources and with the support of certain elements, which are being investigated today, abducted the constitutional President of the Republic, decreed the dissolution of the legislative branch, removed the heads of institutions and refused to recognize governors and mayors — all of them elected democratically by the people.

I am dismayed that such events could have taken place in my country, but I am also proud that a people with a political culture, aware of its responsibility and of its historical commitment — that same commitment I have been speaking of — took to the streets, without weapons but with decisiveness and courage, to defend a democracy, the Bolivarian Constitution and its legitimate Government, and to return to President Hugo Chávez the mandate that had been given him in a free and democratic fashion.

On behalf of my Government, my people and my country, and on behalf of all of us, I should like to thank the Rio Group, the Organization of American States, the G-15, the G-77, the Non-Aligned Movement and in particular those countries that swiftly and unequivocally, without delay of any kind, recognized that this situation was in fact a coup d'état and supported without hesitation the constitutional Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

On behalf of the children of Venezuela and the world, I wish to confirm our concern at the considerable fall in the assistance which developed countries dedicate to the most needy countries. We have not yet understood that investing in children means investing in the future. During the International Conference on Financing for Development held recently in Mexico, President Hugo Chávez Frías proposed the creation of an international humanitarian fund enabling us to break the vicious circle of poverty that so greatly affects children. Such a fund, consisting of a percentage of the world's foreign debt and a percentage of military spending, could then be invested in programmes reducing infant mortality and benefiting children. Only thus will we be responding to the common demand of all the children who attended this summit: to be heard. Therefore I insist on the implementation of this proposal. Thus we would undoubtedly be saying yes to children.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency the Honourable Musuleng Cooper, Minister of Gender and Development of Liberia.

Ms. Cooper (Liberia): On behalf of the Government and the people of the Republic of Liberia and the Liberian delegation, I am pleased to present to the Assembly our profound congratulations for successfully hosting the special session on the future of our children. I also extend our sincere appreciation to the United Nations family, especially to the United Nations Children's Fund, for assisting Liberia in all its national programme efforts to improve the overall situation and environment of the Liberian child, as we also join the world in saying "yes" for children.

It is indeed an honour for the Liberian delegation to be here. Our participation in the special session demonstrates once again the full commitment of our Government and national leaders to contributing meaningfully to the global movement of concerted action on behalf of our world's children.

Liberia's participation today is not in response to its political obligation as part of the global village but stems from a realization and moral conviction that if we do not provide an environment in which our children can achieve their fullest potential, we will be negligent in our duties and obligations as leaders and as parents.

It is in that context that the Liberian Government has achieved the following: ratification and promotion of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with particular emphasis on the girl child; full immunization of all Liberian children, thus nearing the goal of the total eradication of polio in Liberia; and in the spirit of love, reconciliation and cooperation, provision of information and application of a special mobilization strategy to our neighbouring Manu River Basin countries. In April 2001, the establishment of the Ministry of Gender and Development set the stage for the full implementation of the National Programme of Action for Children 2001-2015.

To pursue appropriate policies and action plans which impact positively upon the Liberian child, the Government and national leaders are engaged in dialogue and cooperation in the implementation of capacity-building programmes for war-affected children, including but not limited to advocacy and treatment of HIV/AIDS.

For us in Liberia, the global movement urgently calls us to serious action with real significance, especially since our nation is reported to have some of the lowest indicators for health and well-being, with increasingly high levels of illiteracy, infant mortality, and malnutrition. The situation of our youthful population is further affected by lack of access to basic necessities of life such as safe drinking water and sanitation, as well as basic primary education in the rural areas, especially those affected by the war and continuous, recurrent dissident attacks.

The situation of the Liberian child is continuously compromised due to the inability of the Liberian Government to focus attention on on-going programmes which could impact positively on the lives of our children. Obstacles to further progress on behalf of our children include continued dissident activities in western and north-western Liberia, which further exacerbate the forced displacement of women and children, with children comprising the largest percentage of the displaced population; and the lack of steady and significant support for the national development agenda, which prevents improvements in the areas of health and education. Of more serious concern is the continuing destruction of newly constructed facilities by ongoing dissident attacks in several parts of the country.

Further obstacles are the large national debt and, especially, the inability to repay age-old debts and loans, which has led to increased general poverty among the population. If this issue of the inability of Liberia and other African nations to repay their debts is not addressed as a priority concern for peace, stability and eventual progress, our efforts towards concerted action on behalf of our children will become meaningless propaganda, promises without results.

In addition, the impoverished state especially of the rural poor in Liberia, as in other third world nations, remains very precarious due to the inability of families to adequately feed their children as a result of the prolonged and continued disruption in agricultural activities. To farm and to produce food, the farmers and their families must be settled and stabilized.

The insensitive attitude of some States to the humanitarian plight of Liberia, whose innocent children are victimized by the continued sanctions against our peace-loving people, can only lead to more disastrous conditions for our children, the physically challenged, members of our citizenry, women, children and other vulnerable groups. Are we not our brother's keepers?

Liberia, the former champion of the cause of peace and democracy on the African continent and in the world, now stands naked before you, appealing to the deep recesses of your individual and collective consciousness and pleading with the United Nations to lift its sanctions on Liberia, for the sanctions have only served to increase the suffering of our war-weary people.

It is on behalf of the children that I stand here, pleading with the United Nations to strengthen the ability of the Governments and the peoples of the nations here represented to place our children first. For

alone, we have nothing on which to lean. Our individual and collective difficulties have reached such an alarming level that we are compelled to appeal to the moral reasoning of this noble human institution to place the safety, well-being and happiness of humankind, especially that of our children, first, above other, political, concerns.

I sincerely pray that, together, we will seize this historic opportunity to make up for the broken promises of our inactive years and to meet our unfulfilled goals. Let us make this a renewed opportunity to change our world for the betterment of our children. And may we begin this new era on behalf of each and every child, accepting the global ethical challenge of living for the greater good of all, thereby ensuring that no child will be left behind.

May the love of our children keep us strong, firm and steadfast, and may God grant us peace as we make commitments for the future of the world's children, particularly the children of Liberia.

The Acting President. I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Phetsile Dlamini, Minister for Health and Social Welfare of Swaziland.

Ms. Dlamini (Swaziland): The Kingdom of Swaziland shares the pleasure of being part of this important gathering to consider a topic that is vital to each of the nations of the world.

Despite the escalating challenges, a lot of effort has gone into making Swaziland a better place for all Swazi children. Love for children is deeply entrenched in our culture, because we know that a child is like a seed that carries the family history down the line.

Some achievements made in the Kingdom of Swaziland include the development of a national programme of action for children for the period 1993 to 2000, through which a number of committees were formed to ensure the implementation of children's issues. The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of a Child in 1995 gave impetus to initiatives geared to the protection of children, as well as to those that address issues affecting children. The establishment of a children's unit this year will further help in promoting and protecting the rights of children. Under that unit, closer collaboration is under way with the law enforcement department in order to foster greater protection of children at all times.

While Swaziland has not achieved the goal of free primary education, we have made an effort to make education more accessible and affordable by providing free textbooks to all primary-school children. The Government, working together with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), has facilitated some bursary funding to assist needy children. However, the escalating number of needy children, including orphans, whose needs have not yet been fully met, has dwarfed this effort. The Government and its partners are searching for more innovative ways to improve access to education, including computer literacy.

The biggest challenge is the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The Kingdom has introduced a school health programme, has integrated information on HIV/AIDS into the school curriculum, and has encouraged the formation of health clubs in all schools so as to promote peer education. A child-to-child learning strategy has also been introduced in schools, through which children are taught about the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the prevention and treatment of childhood illnesses and life skills for self-protection against abuse and exploitation.

The Government, in collaboration with NGOs and other partners, has contributed immensely towards the distribution of health services in the country. The expanded immunization programme is accessible to every child, at no cost. This has contributed to the decline in infant mortality. Neonatal tetanus is now a rare disease, and the country is now in the final stages of the certification of a polio-free Swaziland.

As a drive to further improve the health of the nation, including that of children, the Government now fully subsidizes primary health care in all clinics. Furthermore in partnership with various agencies, the Government is working tirelessly to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Families headed by children, which are on the increase because of HIV/AIDS pandemic, continue to pose a challenge.

A juvenile court is now in place, thereby improving the juvenile justice system. The training of officers in the law-enforcement agencies has also had a positive effect in handling cases that involve children. Community protection committees are currently being established, including at the grass-roots level, so as to protect children.

Children and young people have participated in the development of some national programmes, such as the national development strategy. This has encouraged the formation of youth clubs and organizations working around certain issues such as poverty reduction, HIV/AIDS, gender and recreational activities. Under the national poverty-reduction strategy, the Government has developed programmes to encourage youth entrepreneurs. NGOs and community-based organizations have spearheaded the way in this regard.

Some of our cities have junior city councillors, led by junior mayors. This shared responsibility is a good way of grooming young people for leadership positions.

A number of challenges remain, including those relating to poverty, orphans, vulnerable children and a general decline in the economy, which is aggravated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. To address these problems, there is a need to share resources so that the best interests of the child may be served at all times. It is for this reason that Swaziland is committed to promoting orphan care within communities. This poses a challenge for the Government and civil society in assisting communities in coping with this extra challenge. The issue of food security and nutrition for all children in Swaziland also remains a challenge.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that international cooperation in fulfilling our commonly desired goal has yielded positive results in the past, and we believe it remains important. We believe that in order for the children of the world to survive, the international community must engage in intense resource mobilization campaigns. We therefore appeal to this special session to produce concrete proposals for how the additional resources can be mobilized, pooled and then equitably distributed to benefit all of the millions of children in developing countries, particularly in the southern African region, which is the epicentre of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Furthermore, the United Nations should not lose sight of the plight of children in those countries that are not represented in the United Nations. Although the Republic of China on Taiwan is committed to working with the international community for the well-being of children in that country, its efforts are undermined by the fact that it is denied membership in the United Nations. This limits its contribution to the advancement of child welfare in the international community. The Kingdom of Swaziland strongly supports, and earnestly appeals to the international community to support, Taiwan in its quest to participate in the work and activities of the United Nations designed to promote the rights and welfare of all children.

The Kingdom of Swaziland pledges its support for the draft declaration proposed for this special session. We further appeal for more support in providing resources to create a world fit for children. We reaffirm our commitment to ensuring the best interests of the child. Help us to help our children.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Chan Soo Sen, Minister of State for the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Community, Development and Sports of Singapore.

Mr. Sen (Singapore): The world gathers here today to reaffirm one common value that we all share: our children are our future. They have rights that should be protected. We brought them into this world in order for them to take over our heritage from us when we leave. What they experience today as children will shape the world tomorrow, when they become adults.

The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Singapore is a founding member, is committed to building a world fit for our children. At the fourth Meeting of ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare, chaired by Singapore last year, the ministers adopted a Declaration of Commitments for Children in ASEAN. The document reaffirms ASEAN's commitment to protect our children and to provide them with opportunities to learn, play, grow, participate and reach their full potential.

In Singapore children are regarded as valued members of the family and as our country's assets and future. Their rights are well protected because we believe that in Singapore we have: first, good laws; secondly, strong families; thirdly, a comprehensive health-care system; and fourthly, good education that prepares children for life. Let me elaborate on each of these.

First, regarding good laws, we have a good legislative framework that protects the fundamental rights of our children. Our Employment Act prohibits children under the age of 12 from being employed. For young persons under the age of 16, the Act restricts the type of employment and the maximum number of hours

they can work. The Children and Young Persons Act protects children from abuse, neglect and abandonment. It also provides for the rehabilitation of children and young persons who commit offences or who are beyond parental control. In addition, our Women's Charter protects girls against sexual exploitation.

We also accord special protection to children who, unfortunately, get into trouble with the law. We believe that every child deserves a second chance and that institutionalization must be the last resort. Therefore, a community-based approach is taken in which professionals and family members are actively involved to counsel, educate and empower the child. We have a separate court process — the Juvenile Court — that is especially dedicated to these children. We believe that this will ensure that their different needs are well taken care of. We strongly believe that it is our duty to ensure that every child will be able to pick himself or herself up and start anew.

Secondly, regarding strong families, a strong and good family is the best guarantee of children's rights. It provides a nurturing environment in which children can develop. In a survey of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Speaking Out! Voices of Children and Adolescents in East Asia and the Pacific," Singapore children were reported to be happy most of the time and admired their parents most. The same survey also found that the family is still the most significant source of values and love for the child. Singaporeans still expect their marriages to last for life. Our divorce rate is low and the family is essentially strong. This ensures that our children are well protected within the realm of their own families.

No doubt, the family may be under pressure. There will be ups and downs in family life. Families in difficulties need support. Hence, we in Singapore have set up Family Service Centres. They are located in our population centres so that families can get professional help in their neighbourhoods. Family Service Centres are run by a voluntary organization and are partially funded by the Government. They offer a range of family-related services under one roof. For example, couples may turn to Family Service Centres for marriage counselling or to attend parenting programmes. Some Family Services Centres excel in certain specialized areas. One of them, for example, the Bukit Ho Sweet Family Service Centre, has a creative outreach programme, where social workers and volunteers hang out with children living on the edge in order to win them over and provide them with guidance.

We also have voluntary organizations that are dedicated to serving our children. One of them is the Singapore Children's Society. It is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary this year. The Singapore Children's Society has a network of service centres and professionals to cater for the various needs of children and their families. One of the initiatives is called Tinkle Friend, which is a national helpline for children between the ages of 7 and 12. Another creative project is called Cabin Club. This project has cabins located in schools so that children can hang out in cabins at schools, rather than on the streets.

A critical phase in the development of children is adolescence. Adolescents are vulnerable to exploitation if they go astray. The Government of Singapore set up a National Youth Council in 1989 to provide opportunities for young people to maximize their potential and enhance their contributions to society. I am pleased to report that many of their efforts have borne fruit and have resulted in a decrease in the juvenile delinquency rate over the past five years.

Thirdly, with regard to comprehensive health care, good health is fundamental to a child's well-being. We are pleased to report that in the UNICEF State of the World Children's 2001 report, Singapore is ranked among the countries with the lowest infant mortality rate and under-5 mortality. We have invested much since independence towards achieving world-class health care. The care of our children in fact begins even before they are born, because in Singapore women have access to good obstetric practices and quality prenatal care. After a child is born, a comprehensive family health-care system provides for development screening and inoculation during a child's pre-school days. This is followed by a very comprehensive school health services and dental services programme for school-age children.

In fact, the health-care programme for our children is so successful that the two major health issues associated with children are not diseases, but are obesity and myopia. And we do indeed have programmes to help our children exercise and keep fit to overcome obesity, and programmes to fight myopia.

The best gift that we can offer our children is, of course, a good education. Good education has been

Singapore's top priority since independence. Our education is heavily subsidized. Our programmes are good. The school dropout rate is very low. Most children have at least 10 years of education, including in institutions of higher learning, such as polytechnic institutes and universities. Students with disabilities are also integrated into normal schools where possible or, when that is not possible, into special schools.

Let me conclude by saying that Singapore has made progress towards maximizing every child's potential to be the best person that he or she can be. We will continue to do more and do better.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Ruby Pardiwalla, Chairperson of the delegation of the Seychelles.

Mrs. Pardiwalla (Seychelles): Today I bring a message of peace from the children of Seychelles. This special session provides a timely opportunity to reflect on the progress made in implementing the goals set at the 1990 World Summit for Children. In fact, it is more than just timely. It has become a matter of moral duty and pragmatic reality for the children of the world to be, once again, truly at the focus of international attention.

Twelve years ago, the almost universal endorsement of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by Governments worldwide gave reason to hope that these simple truths would be a daily reminder of our responsibilities towards children. Today, slightly more that a decade after its adoption, and at the turn of a century, it is to humanity's credit that much has been achieved. Yet, unfortunately, achievements in some areas also highlight the tremendous amount that still remains to be accomplished in other crucial areas. It is indeed sad to note that much of the dream has gone astray.

What has happened to our aspirations? What has happened to our principles? What has happened to our good intentions? Why are we still battling exploitation, violence, injustice and denial of basic rights towards children in most parts of the world? The Convention has enjoyed widespread and global acceptance by Governments, organizations and individuals at all levels. The rights and responsibilities as laid down are a way of life that we all embody, believe in and identify with. Why then, have we been unable to implement this vision? It would appear that somewhere, somehow, the links between goals and implementation, beliefs and practice, purpose and meaning to life have been slashed, exposing a deep gash.

We cannot truly understand rights and responsibilities without first understanding the values on which they are based. A simple awareness and acceptance of the worth and dignity of each individual child would, maybe, help us focus on what we need to do to respect the Convention. The fulfilment of rights and the building of a better world for our children is ultimately based on bringing back into our daily lives a culture of thinking, attitudes and behaviour based on human values of respect, responsibility, love and peace. We must reinstate the awareness that are all members of one family, that the world's children are our children and that we can all do something to fulfil our responsibility. In this forum, let us, both individually and collectively, reaffirm and rekindle the universal principles and aspirations of the Convention. This time around, let us really work together in unity towards promoting a better world for our children.

I would like to end with a quotation from Deepak Chopra:

> "A principle of physics states that when an electron vibrates, the universe shakes. Let us then, you and I, be these electrons that vibrate at the level of consciousness to bring peace, harmony, joy and love to the children of the world."

We in Seychelles, have reason to hope that, through a joint vibration, there will be a brighter tomorrow for our children and for the children of the universe. But let us all start vibrating now: tomorrow is too late. Remember, the children have said, "We are the present, not the future".

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Ms. Nadine Alatoa, Secretary-General for the Council of Ministers of Vanuatu.

Ms. Alatoa (Vanuatu): It is an honour for me to be here to address this important special session on children. I bring greetings from President Father John Bani and the people of the Republic of Vanuatu. I join previous speakers in thanking Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the capable staff of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for the warm welcome and

the excellent arrangements made for this important special session.

On 30 September 1990, 71 heads of State and 88 other country representatives gathered at the World Summit for Children to endorse the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. Vanuatu was represented at that meeting by the late Prime Minister Father Walter Hayde Lini, who signed the Declaration to show the nation's support for the rights of children. Prior to signing the Convention, Vanuatu had declared a national children's day, which was first celebrated on 24 July 1990. That day remains a national day for all the children of Vanuatu. Following the signing, the Vanuatu Parliament ratified the treaty, in November 1992.

Vanuatu's commitment to the global goals has also resulted in changes to my Government's policy priorities in the areas of education and health. Those areas have been acknowledged to be core sectors that recognize and contribute to child development. Our work is supplemented by the joint efforts of our development-partner agencies, United Nations agencies, national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others too numerous to mention here, to whom I must apologize.

The areas that need improvement for the benefit of the children of Vanuatu are those concerning the health and nutrition status of children, access to basic education, expanding the child immunization programme, changing the health status of women, and programmes and services for young people. I wish to register the Government of Vanuatu's acknowledgement and appreciation, for without support Vanuatu might not have come this far.

The office of the ombudsman of the Republic of Vanuatu is in the process of establishing a child's desk. That desk will provide a mechanism for handling the complaints of children whose rights have been violated.

The emerging issues that challenge the survival, protection and development of our children can be identified in five different areas: rapid population growth, urban squatter settlement, urban food security, equitable access to education and vulnerability of young people.

According to the census of 1999, Vanuatu possesses a population of more than 200,000. Compared to other countries in the region, Vanuatu has a very high population growth rate — 3 per cent — and a very young population, with more than 50 per cent of the population aged 15 to 25 years. The urban concentration has more or less doubled in the last decade.

The issue of urban drift has also contributed to urban squatter settlements. Living standards have changed due to high expectations for employment opportunities and to various changes in the urban cost of living. Food security becomes a problematic issue where there is changing demand for cash-cropping and imported processed-food items. Changing patterns in food consumption and lifestyle have also brought about an increase in lifestyle diseases. The Vanuatu Government recognizes the changes in disease patterns, and last year made a public declaration that public and private institutions and individual households should promote consumption of local island *kakai*, or food.

Although Vanuatu may not have any recorded cases of HIV/AIDS, recent surveillance of sexually transmitted infections showed that sexually-transmitted infection is increasing. As a corrective measure, preventive programmes are currently in place.

The strategies undertaken by the Vanuatu Government to address the issues and to improve the situation of the children of Vanuatu focus on: policy development to guide decision-makers, so as to achieve meaningful results; fostering commitment and ownership at different stages of children's development programmes; development of action plans to bring about practical changes in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; development of a comprehensive information and management system; development and dissemination of information through awareness campaigns and the use of media; improved and expanded access to, and higher-quality, equitable education programmes; promotion of community participation and ownership in primary health-care services; and development of programmes for people with physical and mental disabilities.

In conclusion, I wish to mention that the Vanuatu Government, like those of other Member countries, is committed to ensuring that our global vision for children is achieved.

Vanuatu is conscious that, in order for justice to be done for its children, it must be responsible, so as to ensure that it is a Vanuatu fit for its children.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Virginia Gillum de Quiroga, Chairperson of the delegation of Bolivia.

Mrs. Gillum de Quiroga (Bolivia): I am honoured to be here today at this United Nations special session on children in representation of my country, Bolivia. I was not born in Bolivia, but my heart and my four children are Bolivian. My children were all born in Bolivia, but, unlike the 52 out of every 1,000 who die each year, my children are doing well. I am here for those children who need the Assembly's help, my dedication and our wholehearted efforts.

It is a great honour for me for three reasons: first, because this is a special session on children, a subject very close to my own heart; secondly, because children have participated in the making of the decisions and plans that will come from it, and because true development can take place and be sustained only when participation is broad and the consensus wide as to how to get there; and thirdly and finally, because I have the honour to follow in the footsteps of Gabriela Azurduy, the 13-year-old Bolivian leader who, at the opening meeting, shared with us a message from the children on how to make a better world.

From this important initiative of the United Nations concerning children have come many concrete actions and a great deal of legislation that will continue to make a difference in the lives of many children, and for that I would like to express my gratitude.

During the last decade in Bolivia, we have been true to our commitments to the United Nations and to our children and have seen our infant and maternal mortality rates drop significantly. We have in the last few years begun to make the transformation from a country focused on survival to a country that promotes the rights and protection of the child. Bolivia is beginning to focus on the quality of life that these children will have, after survival is ensured.

The provision of free health insurance has not only saved the lives of many children under 5, it also ensures that fewer of their mothers will die. Our immunization programmes, financed by the Government, have completely eradicated polio and cover 90 per cent of other very common diseases.

Our successful educational reform programme has reduced primary school desertion and repetition. There has been a change in the style of teaching that increases participation and ensures a better quality of education. Bilingual education, often developed with the input of the indigenous populations, many of which did not have the possibility of formal education themselves, has brought a cultural awareness that had been slipping away. Lessons are taught in Aymara, Quechua and Guarani, as well as in Spanish. Many children attend school for the first time, participating actively because they are learning, in a language that is theirs, about things that are important to them.

We are very proud of the legislative advances that have been made in the name of children. In 1999 the Code for Children and Adolescents, which strictly governs their rights, was signed into law. Just recently a supreme decree was signed giving all newborns in Bolivia the right to receive a free birth certificate. Presently we are looking for financial support so that we can ensure that all children have that same right. This week we are awaiting approval of several new bills that will allow international adoptions to take place, help prevent child abuse, give attention to abused children, sanction offenders, and put a stop to the trafficking of children.

Bolivia will benefit over the next 15 years from $1.6 billion in debt relief through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative programme. These funds will flow through municipalities, assigning more money to rural communities because they have more needs. Civil society will have an active role in determining where the funds go and in overseeing the social programmes implemented with these funds. Parents will be able to make decisions involving their own children.

It would be unjust to speak of the advances we have made without mentioning the many areas in which we still need to improve. Our insurance programmes are not being utilized as they should be. We do not have enough schools, nor enough teachers to staff them, and often the laws do not protect the people who need them most.

There are also several important areas, addressing children's specific needs, that require immediate attention, beginning with Government policy, so that we can ensure the realization of, and respect for, the rights of children. Among these issues are child labour, early childhood development, children with disabilities, the growing phenomenon of children living in the streets, neonatal deaths and HIV/AIDS. We can

do better in meeting children's basic needs and ensuring their basic rights.

For these reasons and many more worldwide, we need to continue to work together between countries, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society to fight for the children of the world. Therefore let us together commit ourselves to promoting the rights of the child; demand children's participation and access; and resolutely stand to prevent all forms of child abuse.

In the name of Bolivia, I offer our complete support to the United Nations and our commitment to the plans made and decisions taken during this special session on children, because nothing is sadder then the despair in the eyes of a child without a future, and nothing brings greater joy than the eyes of a child who has been vaccinated, fed and educated. It is up to us to light up the eyes of every child in Bolivia and of every child in the world.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Margrethe Løj, Chairperson of the delegation of Denmark.

Mrs. Løj (Denmark): As this special session comes to an end, I am pleased that children have again so successfully been placed at the top of our agenda. We have come together to talk about children, but we have not only talked. We have listened to the children, and they have influenced our decisions, here in the General Assembly Hall, at the many side events and in the delegations. I do not think that we can ever again discuss the issues of children in the old way, without listening to their opinions.

The children have told us that they want to see the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They are impatient, and for good reason. An enormous gap exists between our many good intentions and the lives that millions of children are forced to live, in poverty and neglect. In spite of progress in some areas, much remains to be done. Good intentions and fine words need to be translated into concrete action.

Poverty is the root cause of most infringements of the rights of children. At the Social Summit in Copenhagen, we promised to eradicate absolute poverty. But progress has been slow. Globally, 25 per cent of all children live in families which have to live on less than $1 per person a day. Millions of children die from preventable diseases. One hundred million children do not go to school. That is why the Millennium Development goals must be attained and why these goals must guide all our actions.

As the Secretary-General has stated, children have the right to demand that we do better. The Convention on the Rights of the Child confirms that children, as well as adults, have rights: they have the right to development and the right to be protected from discrimination, economic exploitation, abuse and violence. They have the right to participate and to be heard in all matters that affect them.

Rights mean reaching not only the few, but also the most marginalized groups of children. We must do more to reach the unreached — not least, children with disabilities and children who belong to ethnic minorities.

Rights also include sexual and reproductive rights. Adolescents are sexually active all over the world. We can deny it, we can be silent about it, but it is a fact. And with silence, we seal the destiny of yet more millions of adolescents as they fall victim to HIV/AIDS, to early and unwanted pregnancies, to unsafe abortions and to sexually transmitted diseases. That trend will be reduced only if we accept the rights and needs of adolescents.

I believe that we can indeed achieve our goals, especially if we recognize that children are not problems or vulnerable groups — they are the best and brightest resource that we have. Therefore, we agree with what the Children's Forum statement said:

> "We are not the sources of problems; we are the resources that are needed to solve them. We are not expenses; we are investments. We are not just young people; we are, above all, human beings and citizens of the world." (*A/S-27/PV.1*).

Engaging children and adolescents in dialogue, listening to their opinions, building partnerships with them and learning from them make good sense. This special session has been a good starting point for furthering that dialogue. Children and adolescents can be important and constructive players in development processes. It will be our challenge to ensure that they are allowed to participate in the design, planning and implementation of programmes that aim at improving their lives.

We, the Governments, must also support children and do everything in our power to help them on their way. In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for children in education and health, we reaffirm our commitment to our partnership with developing countries. The target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance must be honoured. Concrete and determined efforts by the rich world are long overdue.

The future of our children lies with leadership at all levels and in the choices that leaders make. I hope this special session is the beginning of a global movement that puts children first in all matters, not just in words but also in deeds. The children and the adolescents of the world will judge how we managed and, it is to be hoped, hold us accountable for our efforts to protect and promote their rights and to improve their lives. And to the children and the adolescents, I say: please hold us to our commitments, and claim your rights.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tuiloma Neroni Slade, Chairman of the delegation of Samoa.

Mr. Slade (Samoa): This gathering has rightly been proclaimed to be unique and historic. We need to ensure that it is so, not by words alone, but by determined and concrete action. In 1990, world leaders agreed on actions that carried a solemn promise always to put the best interests of children first. This special session is an occasion for rededication to the spirit of that promise.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child must remain at the heart of international efforts to give meaning to the rights of children. The Convention is the most widely accepted human rights instrument ever. It sets out the basic principles for ensuring the realization of children's rights on a global scale. Non-implementation of those principles is at the root of our failure to move significantly forward on children's rights.

We thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report entitled "We the Children" (A/S-27/3). It is not surprising that the report confirms the disparities and the pervasive poverty that we all know exist. More tellingly, the report shows that those conditions are directly related to underinvestment in young people, especially in their health, in their education and in their protection. If Governments are serious about reducing poverty, then they must make children truly their first priority.

My delegation welcomes the proposals for the outcome of this special session. The draft outcome document sets out what we regard as the right ingredients for a world fit for children, and we support its adoption. As the international community, we need to ensure and to safeguard such a world, where children are loved and respected and where they can develop in health, in peace and in dignity. As a representative of the Children's Forum said at the very start of this session, a world fit for children is a world fit for everyone.

My Government believes that for Samoa, the rights and freedoms of children are best nurtured in the context of our traditions and of our culture. The Constitution of my country reflects a strong and fundamental commitment to human rights and freedoms and to equality of opportunity for all citizens, irrespective of gender. A ministry dedicated to women's affairs and charged with a responsibility for children reflects the critical role of women in the traditions and in the development of the country, and it ensures equal opportunities for women and for children in all areas of Samoan society.

Samoa has a population of just under 200,000, 53 per cent of which is under the age of 20. Every person, young or old, has access to basic health services, to adequate and safe water supplies and to sanitary facilities. Improvements are being progressively introduced as we try to overcome the constraints on our resources and other constraints.

Primary education is compulsory for all children. School enrolments at all levels are very high. Major emphasis has also been placed on early-childhood and special education. Village and district communities play key partnership roles, as do private and non-governmental organizations. Of the total Samoan population, approximately 73 per cent of females and 69 per cent of males have received formal education. Samoa's literacy rate is estimated at around 97 per cent.

The provision of health services is highly subsidized by Government. Most publicly funded health services, from immunization to maternal health care and in-patient services, are either free at the point of delivery or heavily subsidized. The Government actively promotes a policy of equal access to health

services for all, with all children under the age of 5 receiving free medical care. There is an ongoing comprehensive project to address the concept of a well child, which includes injury prevention, rheumatic fever prevention and general policy development on children's health.

A national coordination mechanism involving Government departments and all stakeholders is in place. I should also like to say that active and informed media have a vital role to play in the promotion of children's welfare.

Our efforts at the national level are supplemented by what we need to do as the Pacific Islands Forum region. The Permanent Representative of Nauru, our group Chairman, yesterday outlined some of our regional activities in that area, and I endorse what he said. I need to touch on only two aspects.

First is the concept of the Healthy Islands framework, which recognizes, in part, the need for ecological balance. The links between health and the environment and impacts on vulnerable groups, especially children, raise real and serious issues. That point is noted in the draft outcome document for this special session. Small island communities are exposed to significant and sometimes severe environmental degradation, exacerbated by the pressure of urbanization and by the consequences of climate change and of natural disasters.

Secondly, the economies of a regional approach would seem to my delegation to be an aspect that could facilitate improved access and greater use of breakthroughs in information and communication technologies that could offer improved opportunities for education in general and for children in particular.

We fully share the fears and concerns that have been expressed about HIV/AIDS. Our own country has not been spared. While the incidence of HIV/AIDS is low, there is clearly no room for error of policy or for complacency. The consequences for a country as small as mine would be too catastrophic. We have in place a national strategy, and we will continue to seek support and technical assistance as required.

While we can point to significant achievements for the world's children in the past 11 years or so, there remains significant unfinished business, particularly on issues that are critical to the protection of children, including sexual exploitation, the impact of armed conflict, child labour and all forms of abuse.

Children are calling for a response. And while must promise them the future, we must not forget that, as they have so rightly reminded us from this rostrum, they are also very much of the present.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Abdi Hashi, Chairman of the delegation of Somalia.

Mr. Hashi (Somalia): Today, we stand at a historic juncture. More than a decade ago, we the international community adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. At this special session, we are taking stock of the achievements and shortcomings of each country and of the global village in the implementation of the principles and goals enshrined in the Convention and its Optional Protocols. Much has been achieved, but a lot remains to be done. Respecting the rights of our children remains daunting and is a challenge requiring immediate attention at all levels. The children of the world deserve better.

It was in that spirit that it was my privilege to sign yesterday, 9 May 2002, on behalf of the Government of Somalia, the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We shall ratify the Convention soon. We shall also sign the Optional Protocols at the appropriate time.

The children of Palestine and of Somalia deserve better. Palestinian children are denied by the Israeli occupation forces nearly all the rights enshrined in the Convention. Palestinian children are killed by the Israeli forces, their homes are destroyed and their right to a peaceful environment is shattered with impunity.

In Somalia, we acknowledge and appreciate the role of the United Nations, in particular the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization and others, in improving the quality of life of Somali children. However, Somali children continue to face challenges. For example, the rates of child morbidity and mortality in Somalia are extremely high. Our infant mortality rate is among the highest in the world. Curable infectious diseases such as tuberculosis cause more than half of all child deaths. It is estimated that only 10 per cent of Somali children receive all the recommended vaccinations in their first 12 months. Mortality among mothers is among the highest in the world. Only 15 per cent of children in

Somalia sleep under a bed net, and only 28 per cent of the population has access to safe water — not to mention that access to sanitary disposal is very limited. Cholera in Somalia is well above the threshold of 5 per cent, while funds for combating AIDS are insignificant.

In terms of education, a child who was 5 years old in 1990, at the beginning of the civil war in Somalia, and who is now 17 years old, does not have access to structured, formal education. Unable to get an education and to secure a decent livelihood, that 17-year-old boy today is a child soldier, at the mercy of notorious warlords. These child soldiers are taught to kill and to abduct aid workers for ransom or to scare the international community away from engaging in Somalia.

In war-torn societies of the world and particularly in Africa, children are exploited and abused by warlords, who care only about their political survival and interests. Our future, our children, are turned into killing machines. In Africa, more than a million have died from violence, displacement and famine. Conflicts destroy not only the political and social fabric of our societies but also our future, our children.

Children in conflict-affected countries such as Somalia are taught the gun — the killing culture — not the three Rs. They are taught how to handle arms not to heal wounds. Somali children have been denied the right to peace and peaceful development by unscrupulous warlords. The continuous flood of arms and landmines into Somalia encourages the child soldier and child militia culture. In this context, it is imperative that all States, particularly Somalia's neighbouring States, respect and implement the arms embargo on Somalia sanctioned by the Security Council. Strict compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions will enhance the chances for creating the peaceful environment necessary for the full development of the great potential of our children.

In the light of our commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the two Optional Protocols, as well as to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, my Government will continue its peace-building efforts; re-establish basic services; mobilize, encourage and support the existing civil-society efforts in the areas of human rights monitoring, health service provision and education; and form partnerships with women's activist groups to monitor human rights violations against women and to eliminate gender discrimination in all aspects of life. My Government will also mobilize human and financial resources from private and international sources in order to provide the following emergency services: resettlement of displaced children and reunion with their families; the promotion of small-scale economic activities that facilitate the earning of livelihoods; the rehabilitation and counselling of child members of militias and child combatants; and the establishment of mine awareness programmes and the rehabilitation of mine victims, especially children.

However, peace, stability and development opportunities are the first prerequisites for honouring the rights of the child. By fulfilling its mandate to promote peace and stability, my Government will prepare the stage for the adoption and implementation of national programmes that consciously address the needs of Somali children.

In that context, I appeal to the international community to help us not only to comply with the obligations of the Convention we signed yesterday, but also to provide a better life for our children.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Farid Abboud, Chairman of the delegation of Lebanon.

Mr. Abboud (Lebanon) *(spoke in Arabic)*: I would like at the outset to congratulate Mr. Han on his election to preside over the Assembly at this special session. It is my honour to convey to him greetings from His Excellency the President of the Lebanese Republic and best wishes for the success of the session.

Lebanon, which participated in the 1990 World Summit on Children, is more concerned than ever before about the Summit's objectives. Despite the challenges and economic difficulties that Lebanon and the majority of its citizens are facing, we have demonstrated our commitment to the rights of the child by undertaking various initiatives at the legislative level, foremost among them the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, signing the Optional Protocol relating to trafficking in children and child prostitution and acceding to the International Labour Organization Convention banning child labour.

A parliamentary committee on the rights of the child was formed in 1992 in order to update the laws relating to the situation of children in Lebanon, and a

Supreme Council for Childhood was established in 1994. That Council drew up a national consultative framework on cooperation between the private and publics sectors so as to protect the rights of the child. We also established a ministry for youth and sports, which caters to children and adolescents, elaborated laws on disabled children and juveniles and on compulsory education, in addition to the adoption of other practical measures.

In the field of public health, Lebanon, working in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has managed to reduce by one third the mortality rate for infants under five by providing medical treatment, including treatment to combat polio. Lebanon has also sought to combat malnutrition among children, leading to a reduction in the effects of that phenomenon. Indeed, studies and indicators by UNICEF and WHO show that the Lebanese experience has proved to be one of the most successful in this area.

With regard to education, the Lebanese parliament adopted a law relating to free and compulsory primary-school education. A national survey carried out in 2000 showed that primary-school enrolment is greater than 98 per cent for both girls and boys. Enrolment in nursery school and kindergarten is 85 per cent. The Government has sought to modernize the educational curriculum, rehabilitate school buildings and amend Lebanese labour laws as they relate to children so as to reduce child labour, especially in industrial and hazardous jobs.

With regard to the dangers of smoking and drug and alcohol abuse, in 1997 the parliament adopted a modern law that includes articles relating specifically to children, including provisions to protect them and to rehabilitate those who are addicted to drugs.

Conditions for children in our region have been negatively impacted by the continuation of Israel's aggressive policies against civilian communities. Israel's occupation and bombardment of southern Lebanon, and its infrastructure and institutions, which continued for many years, have caused enormous destruction and have badly eroded the social infrastructure. The negative effects on children were tremendous.

Paragraph 74 of the Secretary-General's report on landmines states that the Israeli occupation left behind more than 400,000 landmines, which have killed many children and other civilians. Mine clearance is proving to be difficult because Israel has not provided Lebanon with detailed maps showing where mines were planted in our territory. Furthermore, the occupation by Israel of Palestinian territories and its pursuance of a consistent and comprehensive policy of aggression against the Palestinian Authority and its institutions, including the targeting of civilians, has destroyed or paralysed educational and health-care institutions in Palestine and subjected the Palestinian people to grave dangers, which must be dealt with quickly, before disaster strikes.

The Israeli practices had catastrophic consequences in the Jenin camp, where Israel targeted civilians of all ages, including innocent children. It is not the school curriculum that is the main reason for the violence in Palestine, as some have claimed, but this pattern of aggression against civilians, especially children, that is responsible. Facts, not words, lead to action; we must change the facts of occupation. The child whose father is killed, whose brother is detained or whose house is destroyed will resist, whatever the school curriculum says. Occupation and oppression are among the most dangerous threats to children and to childhood. The best way to protect the children is to put an end to the occupation, which is destroying their lives and their territory.

Furthermore, the continued embargo against Iraq, whatever the arguments used to justify it, has destroyed the social infrastructure, especially that relating to children and adolescents. It is incumbent upon us to review ways of dealing with this issue so as to save the children of Iraq, who are being put at risk.

Lebanon, while emphasizing the need for complementarity between the efforts of the Government and civil society, reaffirms its commitment to the rights of the child, and it pledges to the Assembly at this session that it will take into consideration the objectives set out in the document to be adopted at the end of the session.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jeremiah Manele, Chairman of the delegation of Solomon Islands.

Mr. Manele (Solomon Islands): With the Children's Forum and the many other supporting events being held during the week, this special session of the General Assembly on children is undoubtedly providing us with a historic opportunity to strive for a

world fit for children — a world that is just and peaceful and from which extreme poverty is eradicated. Such a world is one in which child and maternal mortality is reduced and where all children have access to clean water and basic education. It is a world that is well equipped to combat HIV/AIDS and malaria.

Solomon Islands fully concurs with the Secretary-General that children's issues are critical, because the starting point of international development strategies that emphasize equitable human development is, quite naturally, the rights and well-being of children. It is children whose individual development and social contributions will shape the world's future, and it is through the advancement of children that the intergenerational cycles of poverty, exclusion and discrimination can be broken.

My Government is therefore committed to the welfare and protection of the rights of all children. Our constitution grants children the same rights and protection as adults, and other existing laws are designed to protect children from sexual abuse, child labour and neglect. Children are also respected and protected within the traditional extended-family system. In addition, various policy frameworks have been developed to support activities throughout the country targeting children. These include the 1996 revised national children's policy and plan of action, the national food and nutrition policy of 1995, the breast-feeding policy of 1996, the 1998 national women's policy, and the 2000 national youth policy.

Our infant mortality rates reflect major improvements during the past decade, dropping from 38 per 1,000 live births in 1986 to 28 per 1,000 in 1999. The major causes of infant mortality are childbirth complications, pneumonia and malaria. Malaria is also the major cause of death in children under five years of age. Our immunization programme is well established, with a coverage rate of more than 80 per cent of children under one year of age. However, malnutrition in children under five years is an increasing concern. Drug and substance use among young people is also an emerging issue. With regard to clean water, most urban households have access to a chlorinated water supply, but only 60 per cent of the rural population has access to clean water.

Education is not yet universal or compulsory in the Solomon Islands. The current policy is to provide greater opportunity for access at all levels of education and to increase the provision of education services. Since 1996 early childhood education has been part of the formal education system. The literacy rate has increased from an estimated 22 per cent in 1994 to 64 per cent in 1999.

Despite some progress, much more remains to be done. The recent ethnic unrest and its devastating impacts have produced a major setback in all sectoral programmes. It has caused population displacement and has disrupted coordination and administrative systems. School enrolment, which had increased progressively, also declined drastically in areas affected by the crisis. The Government is working diligently to restore law and order and to make Solomon Islands a secure and peaceful place for our children.

Economic reconstruction and development is also a key priority, as our capacity to deliver better health and education services depends on it. The support of our development partners, including United Nations funds and programmes, is also vital. The Government welcomes and supports the initiative taken by UNICEF to evaluate its programmes in the Solomon Islands. Additional financial resources are required to expand those programmes and to sustain and supplement national efforts towards realizing the needs and rights of our children. Above all, we are fully cognizant of the need for good governance and sound polices, and we are taking the necessary steps towards that end.

Our efforts to create a world fit for children must be based on universal participation. Every country and entity should be allowed to participate in international organizations that contribute to the realization of children's rights, if we are to create a world fit for all children. In that connection, my Government strongly supports the request of the Republic of China on Taiwan to participate as an observer in the World Health Assembly (WHA). Participation in the WHA is a matter of fundamental human rights. It is a universal truth that health and humanitarianism have no boundaries, and that disease heeds no borders. Let us not forget the children and young people of Taiwan. They too have rights. The Government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Taiwan have contributed to many humanitarian causes, including children's causes around the world. Let us give them the opportunity to benefit from, and contribute to, a world fit for all children.

Finally, Solomon Islands is grateful for the support of its development partners during the last decade, including that of United Nations funds and programmes. I also wish to acknowledge the contributions of civil society and NGOs, including the Solomon Islands Red Cross for its work with disabled children. My Government is committed to reinvigorating these partnerships.

Tonight we will adopt a programme of action for the next decade entitled "A world fit for children". Let us match our words with action by making the necessary investments in our children. Let compassion and a true sense of our common humanity be the guiding principles of our endeavours to serve our children and future generations. Solomon Islands joins in the global movement to build a world fit for all children.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Thomas Hammarberg, Chairman of the delegation of Sweden.

Mr. Hammarberg (Sweden): We are close to a conclusion. The negotiations are over, and tonight we will probably be able to adopt a declaration and a plan of action — and that in a spirit of consensus. We want to thank and congratulate the Bureau, Patricia Durrant and her colleagues, and, of course, to recognize the guidance and support provided by UNICEF. With that decision later tonight, we pledge new efforts to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child. That pledge to our children should now be turned into reality. No one is satisfied with empty promises, certainly not the young generation. Actions are required.

The implementation of the rights of the child is more than a question of charity; it is a political challenge requiring a political vision, political will and a conscious political ambition. The Convention on the Rights of the Child tells us to give the best interests of the child primary consideration in all the decisions we take affecting children. That, in turn, requires a serious child-impact analysis as a normal aspect of political and administrative decision-making.

We should review our legislation in order to make it consistent with the principles of the rights of the child, and of the Convention as a whole. One example is to ban corporal punishment and other abuse of children. We should establish a system of gathering data and statistics relevant to the situation of children. Such data should be disaggregated on the basis of gender, age, disability, family status and other essential criteria. Such facts should be analysed as a basis for further reforms. We should also support the systematic monitoring of the situation of children, for instance through the establishment of an independent ombudsman who could speak for the interest of the child and propose child-friendly reforms. We should spread awareness about the situation of all children and their rights. Professionals working directly with children should be given education and advice on the meaning of child rights. The Convention should be part of school curricula, and daily life in schools should be organized in the spirit of the Convention, that is, we need to democratize our schools.

The Convention also tells us to use the maximum of our available resources to secure children's well-being. The interests of the child should weigh heavy in our national budget processes. More affluent societies and countries have an obligation to assist in burden-sharing. When it comes to children our duties do not stop at national frontiers. Development cooperation programmes should now be directed towards assisting in the implementation of the rights spelled out in the action plan we are to adopt.

For our part, we pledge to continue to allocate more than 0.7 per cent of our gross national product to development cooperation and to focus our contribution even further on the needs of children. We are prepared to share experiences — both progress and difficulties — with all our partners.

All these political actions should be undertaken in dialogue with the young generation. A major challenge is to open up adult society to young people. On the local and national levels we should seek avenues to a meaningful, respectful dialogue. It should be obvious that we involve children in all matters concerning them. We should respect their views in accordance with their age and maturity, as the Conventions says.

In that spirit, the Swedish delegation has asked a young member of our delegation, Maja Frankel, to conclude this presentation with her reflections on child participation.

Ms. Frankel (Sweden): In 1990, the Children's Summit decided to create a better world for children. Why has it not happened? The world today has the resources to make all children survive and grow up. My answer is that the political will to involve young people in decision-making is still missing. Participation: you

have all used and abused that word many, many times, but do you really know that it means? Twelve years ago you forgot to ask the experts themselves, the young people. However, the Convention granted us rights; and for this session there was some progress made. More children were included in the preparations and in governmental delegations. Unfortunately, we forgot to define meaningful participation before we started to practice it.

It is not participation when young people are present just as decoration, to smile gratefully or just to sing and dance. Neither is it participation when we have inferior meeting rooms and translation to those of adult delegates. We often need more assistance, but we can do without luxury.

Participation becomes meaningful when we are here on the same terms as everyone else — before, during and after decisions are made. And we do not expect you to listen, smile and say that you agree if you do not. Respect is when you take our views seriously. Tell us what you disagree about and be prepared to make compromises with us. We are not stupid. We understand that all cannot be achieved at once. With that kind of meaningful participation, young people can start being seen as a big resource instead of a burden or a problem.

It is common to say that we represent the future. That is not the best reason to involve us. Instead, we are living in the present and it is today that many of us suffer too much. We are the experts on the realities of young people today, not on how it was 20 or 40 years ago. I know that you have all been young, but the world is changing fast. To understand how the present forms the future, you have to listen to us and respect us as you respect other experts.

I want to look all of you in the eye to say that if, when adopting the Convention on the Rights of the Child, you had realized that it meant dealing with us seriously, I am not sure that you would have agreed on it.

Finally, the more opinions that are heard, the harder it is to reach agreement; but the chances are that important aspects will not be forgotten. Understanding how children live today is how we can make the Convention come true. That is what we want to do, isn't it?

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jean-François Giovanninni, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Switzerland.

Mr. Giovanninni (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): The Swiss delegation would first of all like to thank the President and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for organizing this special session of the General Assembly devoted to children. The Swiss delegation takes great pleasure in participating in this event of such fundamental importance, which aims to reaffirm the commitment of the entire international community to make the rights of the child a reality.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child constitutes a concrete legal basis to evaluate the efforts that have been made, to set goals and to mobilize new energy. Along with the Convention, other international instruments strengthen the rights of the child. In particular, those instruments include the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182, on the worst forms of child labour; the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Many — far too many — children are still living under precarious conditions, without basic education or access to adequate care and health services, confronted daily by all forms of violence and discrimination, and exploited economically or sexually. Children are therefore a vulnerable group, and protecting them is essential. But within that group there are children who are even more exposed, and appropriate measures must be taken to meet their specific need for protection. These include in particular the disabled, those belonging to minority groups, street children, refugee and internally displaced children, children who have been orphaned by AIDS and others living in intolerable situations.

Switzerland is doing everything within its power to ensure that children are better protected at the national and international levels, both in law and in fact. Switzerland's commitment is based on the following fundamental principles: protection; respect for the physical and mental integrity of children; the prohibition of discrimination, particularly between boys and girls; the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the opinions of the child.

Switzerland will continue its commitment to eradicate poverty and to promote human security. My country is determined to protect to the fullest children involved in armed conflict and affected by it. That protection entails, inter alia, condemning all involvement of children under the age of 18 in armed conflict, respecting international humanitarian law and protecting and assisting all vulnerable groups.

At the national level, Switzerland will redouble its efforts on behalf of children in the following five priority areas: preventing violence against children, particularly sexual exploitation; fighting trafficking in human beings; encouraging the participation of children and young people at all levels of society, be it within the context of the family, schools or politics; and, lastly, working to better integrate foreign-born children, in particular as regards training.

On 29 May 2002, Switzerland will present to the Committee on the Rights of the Child its first report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We consider the Committee's expertise to be essential to critically assessing the situation of children in Switzerland and to identifying future courses of action.

Switzerland welcomes the existence of a global consensus on the need to protect and promote the rights of the child. Although major progress has been made in various regions of the world in a number of areas since the 1990 World Summit for Children, obstacles remain and major new challenges have arisen, including the consequences of HIV/AIDS on children. The entire international community must continue and strengthen its efforts. Switzerland will contribute to those efforts with a strong commitment of its own.

The Acting President: In accordance with a decision taken by the Assembly at its 5th plenary meeting, the General Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Ivan Šimonović, President of the Economic and Social Council.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia), President of the Economic and Social Council: We all know that children are the world's future. Our investment in children today is a moral imperative, and the only real legacy that we will leave behind. So, are we investing enough?

The United Nations Children's Fund tells us that children are often the first victims of armed conflicts, economic recession and poverty. In developing countries, one out of three children live in absolute poverty. In families with incomes lower than $1 per day 26 of every 100 will not be immunized against any disease, 30 will suffer from malnutrition in their first five years of life, 19 will have no access to clean drinking water and 40 will live without adequate sanitation. In the numerous conflicts being fought around the world, 300,000 children are fighting in wars for which they are not responsible and which bring only immense suffering to them. We know that out of every 100 children, 17 will never go to school. Of every 100 children who enter first grade, 25 will not reach the fifth grade. We know that in some regions and countries, and especially in Africa, the numbers are even starker. All over the world, too many children continue to be born into a life of chronic poverty and hopelessness, and become victims of sexual exploitation, conflict, and HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

It is obvious that we are not investing enough. Responding to children's rights, interests and needs must become a political priority for all. By failing to invest in them now, we undermine their future and the future of the world. We are facing a knowledge-driven global economy, where the quality of human capital has become a crucial factor in increasing incomes for both the individual and the State. How can children with deficits such as these in the areas of health and education have a fair chance to better their standard of living as adults and contribute meaningfully to their societies?

As the Assembly is aware, the Economic and Social Council will be meeting in July at the ministerial level to debate the theme "The contribution of human resources development, including areas of health and education, to the process of development". During that session we should not talk about those matters in the abstract. I will urge my colleagues to reaffirm and expand our commitment to concrete intervention in health, nutrition, water and sanitation, as well as education for all children, especially girls. It is imperative that we invest in children's health and education so as to give them the tools to create their own opportunities and to escape poverty.

The current special session of the General Assembly on children is providing us with a comprehensive agenda for children as citizens of the society of today and tomorrow. Together with the

Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, that new agenda for children in the twenty-first century contains sets of standards and actions aimed at securing the well-being of all children.

This special session represents an important link in the chain of major conferences and summits intended to create a set of internationally agreed norms. The Millennium Summit committed us, among other goals, to halve extreme poverty and hunger, to achieve universal primary education and gender equity, to halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and malaria by 2015.

We should insist from now on that, in working to reach these targets, our interventions focus on children's rights, interests and needs. We are heartened by the new spirit of international cooperation and solidarity that has come out of the International Conference on Financing for Development, held at Monterrey. A couple of weeks ago, during the discussion between the Economic and Social Council and the Bretton Woods institutions it was emphasized that the Monterrey consensus represents a performance contract between donor and recipient countries, one that has to be delivered on. So let us start now with our children.

The Economic and Social Council can contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the creation of a world fit for children by continuing to mobilize international political support. Furthermore, the Economic and Social Council can, in its oversight and management responsibilities, ensure a coherent, coordinated and targeted response by the entire United Nations for the implementation of actions required to achieve these goals. To that end, the Council will mobilize its own subsidiary machinery, in particular its functional commissions, as well as the full, broad potential of civil society organizations, including non-governmental organizations, the private sector and academia.

A world fit for children is possible. It is entirely up to us whether we will be remembered with a curse or a blessing. Let us work together and make our children proud of us.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Hussein Hassouna, Chairman of the observer delegation of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Hassouna (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): The leaders of the world are today participating in this special session, which is being held 12 years after the World Summit for Children, to review the goals on the protection of children endorsed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. With Somalia's signature yesterday, all Arab States have acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The States members of the League of Arab States have acted effectively; they have implemented national plans of action and have made sincere efforts to implement the Convention. They have done so in response to a noble global call, but also to protect the Arab heritage, where children and families have pride of place.

Most Arab States have established supreme councils on children's affairs and have enacted laws on the rights of the child on the basis of guidelines adopted by the League of Arab States. States members of the League of Arab States submit periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child at Geneva and benefit from the comments of that Committee as well as those of Arab League bodies such as the committee on children. The latter reviews national efforts to implement plans of action to carry out the outcomes of its meetings.

In March 2001, the cause of children was the subject of a summit-level meeting of the League of Arab States held in Amman. There, participants called for effective follow-up to the results of the summit. The Arab Summit in Beirut also adopted very important legislation and guidelines regarding the rights of the child and the issue of protecting Palestinian children from the unprecedented violence to which they are being exposed. The legislation aims at protecting the rights of children and at implementing and enforcing other international agreements on children and on their survival.

The President returned to the Chair.

Today, Palestinian children are isolated in their world, landlocked in their own homeland, deprived of food and medicine. We call on the Assembly to adopt a resolution establishing a mechanism to investigate the atrocities committed against Palestinian children and another mechanism to ensure the protection of Palestinian children.

The special session is important because it is being held at the dawn of a new decade and a new millennium. This is a historic moment for human

civilization, notably because of globalization. That is not a new phenomenon, though it is very different in terms of its goals and tools and its various positive and negative aspects. Its negative aspects are increased poverty, growing numbers of poor people in various regions of the world and increased suffering for millions of children. In many countries, there has been a deterioration in the health of children and families, and in education. There has been an increase in armed conflicts in many parts of the world. The main victims of such conflicts are children, who lose their lives, who are permanently injured or whose innocence is violated through abuse and sexual exploitation. These are the reasons for the formulation of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention in addition to all the other international instruments for the protection of children.

The slogan of the special session, to create a world fit for children, is very eloquent. It describes the real situation and promotes the status not only of children but of all related issues. This question requires our focused attention. Donors must help implement the 20/20 Initiative as it relates to international assistance for children. We also need to protect children in armed conflict and those affected by occupation and international sanctions. The Convention should be considered a point of departure for future work.

I would like to stress the importance of the family in raising young people while instilling in them the moral values which emerge from divine law. In their families and in society, adults must set an example. A world fit for children would be our children's salvation.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. John Richardson, Chairman of the observer delegation of the European Community.

Mr. Richardson (European Community): In addition to the statement made by Spain on behalf of the European Union, it is a great pleasure and honour for me as a European Commission official and as a father to address this special session on behalf of the European Community. It is special in a double sense, because it is the first time the General Assembly has specifically addressed issues relating to children but also because of its unique composition — including young delegates for the first time.

Twelve years ago the World Summit for Children set a precedent by causing a shift in international priorities. Since then, increasing importance has been given to human and social development and to the fight against poverty. In that respect, the work accomplished by a series of major United Nations conferences -- on population, social development, gender, education and communicable diseases — provides an agreed framework for national and international action, reaffirmed by the Millennium Declaration. This special session highlights the fact that children are central to human progress and that, therefore, there cannot be a better future for the world unless there is a better future for its children.

Creating a world fit for children is about creating an enabling environment with impact on the everyday lives of children and their families. This must be reflected in poverty-eradication strategies, but also in mobilizing resources at the national and international levels. The European Union collectively provides 55 per cent of all official development assistance. At the recent International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey, the European Union announced its intention to further increase development assistance by $7 billion per year by 2006, from 0.33 to 0.39 per cent of gross national product (GNP), and to continue towards the target of 0.7 per cent of GNP.

In implementing our policies, we recognize children as a particularly vulnerable group in the overarching policy focus on poverty. Within that framework, the mainstreaming of gender aspects and human rights, including rights of the child based on the Convention of the Rights of the Child, is closely linked with our poverty eradication efforts.

In the protection and promotion of children's rights, implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child — the most widely ratified international instrument in the world — is crucial. It is by basing our action for children on its general principles that we will be able to secure the progress required.

Concerted international efforts have brought health, education and gender issues to the core of the development process — which is essential, in particular, for children, who are among the most vulnerable members of the society. There is also a new global consensus, reflected, for instance, in wide support for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, to respond effectively to those major diseases, which hit children hardest. We have recently seen the first grants made to countries to enable them to scale up their efforts in that respect.

Considering that half of the world's 3 billion poor are children, urgent implementation of the commitments is needed to complete the unfinished agenda of the 1990 World Summit. The end-decade review by the Secretary-General (A/S-27/3) highlights that progress in creating a better world for children has been very uneven, with obstacles still to be overcome, particularly in developing countries, where a large majority of the 129 million children born this year will live.

As acknowledged in the draft plan of action, poverty remains a serious obstacle to meeting the needs and protecting and promoting the rights of children. It should be every child's right to grow up in health, peace and dignity. Poverty eradication is at the heart of our development strategies with, as essential components, food security, education and health — including access to services and the prevention of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

The four priority action areas highlighted in the draft plan of action — promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protection from abuse and violence and combating HIV/AIDS — are all already important areas for the development and humanitarian policies of the European Union.

Also, we fully support efforts to assist children affected by conflict, building on the obligations and principles spelled out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children are the first and most vulnerable victims of armed conflicts, whose effects on children can be diverse and long-term — unfortunately, often life-long. Recognizing that the legal responsibility for protecting children affected by armed conflicts falls to States, the European Community is ready to contribute to those efforts through the provision of humanitarian assistance to children in areas affected by conflict. However, our endeavours require cooperation from all State parties in order to ensure full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to regions of concern.

The impact of armed conflicts on children is not yet fully documented. The lack of hard facts is not only detrimental to the credibility of international advocacy efforts; it is also a major obstacle to improving humanitarian response. As a major donor of international humanitarian assistance, the European Community would like to take this opportunity to encourage activities aimed at improving data collection and analysis related to children in armed conflicts. Thus we welcomed the initiative, supported by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and by UNICEF, to establish an international research network on children affected by armed conflicts.

We welcome the recent entry into force of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Right of the Child, on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In our programme for the establishment of an area of freedom, security and justice in the European Union, we introduced a new dimension in 1999 relating to children in fields such as the fight against human trafficking and against sexual exploitation and a common asylum and immigration policy. Our Daphne and STOP programmes address issues in relation to the protection of children against violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation.

In the context of the EU's enlargement process, the European Commission is monitoring children's rights with a view to ensuring that the Convention is respected by the candidate countries. More information on our activities in support of children can be found in the document entitled "European Community responses to the World Summit for Children", which has been distributed at this session.

We welcome this special session and the important draft outcome document that the Assembly is about to adopt, which is aimed at creating a world fit for children and youth, who, after all, represent 35 per cent of the world's population and who one day will inherit and build on our investments. The future cannot wait. It must be tackled hands-on, now and every day, in order to create an enabling environment for the fulfilment of the potential of millions of children in the world. When we leave this evening, it will be our responsibility and duty to translate the concrete and focused objectives of the outcome document into an inclusive world fit for all children, whatever a child's point of departure in life may be. That is the goal towards which we must strive with determination.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mokhtar Lamani, Chairman of the observer delegation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Mr. Lamani (Organization of the Islamic Conference) (*spoke in French*): The Secretary-General

of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Mr. Abdelouahed Belkeziz, has charged me with reading out the following message.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

"At the outset, I should like to congratulate you, Sir, on your presiding over this special session of the General Assembly on children. It is a pleasure for me to address this important question, which has such important ramifications for future generations throughout the Islamic world, since the percentage of children in our populations is high, exceeding that of many other countries of the world.

"Since Islam is concerned with the entire realm of reality, in both its spiritual and its material aspects, and since children grow to adulthood within the context of the family, which must ensure every aspect of their education, we view the family as the basic unit of society. For that reason, Islam has established laws to eliminate elements that have negative effects on the family and to define elements that are cohesive.

"The OIC has particular interest in the fate of children. It has participated, together with the United Nations, in special efforts on behalf of children's welfare since 1989. It has acted to enhance the World Declaration on Children, issued in 1990. It has held numerous conferences in that regard, attended by representatives of many international organizations. Moreover, it has adopted a series of resolutions and recommendations and is engaging in consultations with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to hold a ministerial conference on children's social welfare and prosperity.

"The international community has come to the conclusion that the main objective of development should be improving the human condition. Any development that fails to place the human being at the forefront of its priorities would be a failure. Since children constitute 40 per cent of the present world population, we cannot ignore the fact that, for many reasons, the improvement of children's welfare has become an imperative for human societies throughout the world. I shall name a few of those reasons.

"First, children are the vanguard of the future and the shapers of tomorrow. Preparing them adequately for that mission is like preparing ourselves adequately, for our own sake and for that of future generations. Secondly, children are the weakest and most vulnerable sector of our society and the most prone to disease and epidemics. They are also the sector most affected by famine, war and other natural catastrophes. Thirdly, they suffer the most from human exploitation, such as cheap child labour, besides being the most vulnerable to deviance and temptations. For all those reasons, special care needs to be devoted to children with a view to helping them in their childhood journey so that they can enjoy conditions that are natural, including protection, security and safety.

"It augurs well that this important session is taking place to review which objectives have been achieved among those adopted by the World Summit for Children, held in New York more than a decade ago. Among the most important goals set at that Summit were lowering the level of malnutrition, fighting disease and decreasing the incidence of disability among children, as well as improving educational conditions in developing countries.

"A review of the situation of children worldwide over the past decade shows real progress, chiefly in the areas of health, education and social services. However, millions of children in the developing world still fall victim to disease and malnutrition, and some 100 million of them have no chance to acquire an education. That reflects the fact that the funds pledged at the World Summit for Children were never actually disbursed and that the proposed investments in social services never materialized.

"It is worth noting that the large number of States for which I have the honour to act as spokesman today continue on the path towards development. During the previous two centuries, they were prey to colonialist forces and were regarded as a sort of war booty. Their wealth and natural resources were exploited and plundered by colonial imperialist powers, and their peoples were rendered ever more illiterate. They were left afflicted with the most severe political, economic

and social problems, many of which severely affected their children's destiny.

"Just as those countries were beginning to recover, the new trend of globalization emerged. That new reality has again marginalized countries that are on the path towards development. Those countries are asking the wealthy nations to relieve them of the burden of accumulated debt, but they are also in dire need of assistance to lower their infant and child mortality rates and to enable surviving children to develop in normal conditions.

"The Organization welcomed the idea of earmarking 20 per cent of national budgets for essential social services as well as a similar percentage from official development assistance.

"The OIC has time and again urged, and continues to urge, that the necessary measures be taken to prevent more armed conflicts. In considering special measures to avoid conflict and to manage, or better yet, resolve them, it underlined the importance of devoting special attention to the needs of children and women, the principal victims of modern wars. It has called for truces whenever and wherever fighting is taking place, as well as peaceful measures that would allow the safe passage of health services, supply goods, relief items and vaccines. It has also called for prohibiting the stockpiling, exporting or use of landmines.

"Let me touch on the tragic situation of Palestinian children at this dreadful time of unceasing Israeli attacks in the Palestinian territories. Such a situation redoubles our responsibility towards those children persecuted in Palestine and elsewhere in the world — our responsibility to protect their rights and to guarantee them safe, sound and stable family conditions, so that succeeding generations can be equipped with a good and useful education and can learn strong moral values, based on mercy and compassion for the weak, respect of others, sympathy and tolerance.

"Prosperity on earth is closely linked to the kind of upbringing we provide for our children in terms of a sound environment and a decent education, as they are the major hope for humanity."

The President: I give the floor to Mr. Jack Hanning, Head of Relations with International Organizations of the Council of Europe.

Mr. Hanning (Council of Europe): The Council of Europe, which today encompasses almost 200 million children and teenagers in 44 countries, warmly welcomes this special session on children as a valuable opportunity to renew our commitment to the ideals and principles agreed at the World Summit for Children 10 years ago.

The Council of Europe has always recognized the universality and the importance of the standards and principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Council's own 1950 European Human Rights Convention and its 1961 European Social Charter provide legal protection for children.

The Human Rights Convention applies to all individuals, including children, who may themselves exercise their rights before national courts, and, if need be, before the European Court of Human Rights, which has examined many cases concerning children's rights, with profound effects on all member States. In this particular context, it should also be noted that the Convention's sixth Protocol clearly outlaws the death penalty in the Council's member countries.

The Social Charter, for its part, defines social and economic rights and includes a ban on the employment of children under 15. The Charter also allows for collective complaints to be taken to Strasbourg by social partner organizations or international non-governmental organizations.

Other Council of Europe standards for children have been drawn up on matters such as protection of children in the field of biology and medicine, placement, adoption, custody and family reunion for migrants' children, to name but a few.

New standards have recently been prepared to combat child pornography in the Convention on Cyber-Crime, which was adopted in Budapest in November 2001 and has already been signed by 33 European and non-European States. Another new convention on contact concerning children was adopted by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers in Vilnius only last week, on 3 May.

The Council of Europe has also just decided to set up a group of specialists on the protection of

children against sexual exploitation. This group is expected to develop a series of measures working in close cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Interpol and the European Union in order to ensure a common approach to the protection of children against sexual exploitation.

In the wake of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Council of Europe agreed the European Convention on the exercise of children's rights, which ensures their rights are respected, in particular in family court proceedings. A Standing Committee to monitor implementation of the Council of Europe Convention is being established, and it is hoped that the United Nations will be associated with its work.

Children are the leitmotif of many areas of Council of Europe activity. For instance, full employment of human rights, including children's rights, requires active participation and autonomy at an early age. This multidisciplinary approach and the emphasis on child participation is also apparent in the new Forum on Children and Families, in which children and young people are directly involved. It will focus on priority areas such as participation, children at risk, poverty and social exclusion.

Inevitably, the main focus of our work is in the pan-European context, but we believe it important also to work within the wider international community with other organizations and other regions on what is, after all, a common agenda.

That is why we would welcome the organization of specific interregional forum, jointly with the United Nations, to examine in depth the interrelationship between social development and full enjoyment by children of their rights.

That is why the Council of Europe welcomes this opportunity to take forward into the new millennium, with the United Nations and UNICEF, the plans and commitments made in the course of this special session.

Children are indeed our future. Children must be our common cause.

The President: I give the floor to Mr. Jean De Courten, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva.

Mr. De Courten (International Committee of the Red Cross) (*spoke in French*): The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is grateful to be able to address this important international meeting. The ICRC keenly hopes that this special session will enable States to take energetic and concrete measures that will truly improve the situation of children throughout the world.

The ICRC is determined energetically to pursue its humanitarian activities, of which children are a prime beneficiary. The Declaration and Plan of Action give an important place to the protection of children in armed conflict. This focus is amply justified, because war represents a formidable obstacle to the achievement of the goals set by the international community in its final document. War means insecurity, danger and deprivation for countless children. Responding to their needs is particularly difficult and requires increased efforts.

For many years, the International Committee of the Red Cross has been striving to make a contribution. It has done so through its activities for the civilian population as a whole, as well as through measures targeted at children. Indeed, experience has taught us that protection and assistance efforts directed at communities and families is often the best way of ensuring security for children and of protecting their physical and mental health. The ICRC intervenes with the parties to conflict on behalf of civilians and detainees, as well as working in the areas of nutrition, health care and orthopaedic and other medical services. Furthermore, it pays particular attention to unaccompanied children and promotes family links by helping families to exchange messages and search for their relatives, and whenever possible, it facilitates family reunification.

The ICRC is also determined to carry out its activities in the area of standard-setting. In this respect, it should be noted that the current legal regime provides substantial protection for children through the State. But regulations must be enforced, and that task is incumbent first and foremost on States. To ensure respect for international humanitarian law, States must, inter alia, disseminate information about existing laws among the armed forces and, as far as possible, the general population. The ICRC is contributing actively to this effort in cooperation with States through its training and dissemination activities. The ICRC is also prepared to assist States in drafting national legislation to implement international humanitarian law.

Among recent legal developments, the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child deserve praise. They highlight two particularly serious risks to which children are exposed — sexual exploitation and involvement in conflict. To prevent these risks, we should not only adopt preventive measures, but also provide support for or even reconstitute the social and family context for children. This is one of the important functions of a successful rehabilitation process. In the case of child soldiers, this may be particularly difficult because of their traumatic experiences in combat, lack of education, separation from the family environment or the destruction of the physical and social environment.

In order to provide lasting support for children traumatized by violence, several national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, with the help of the International Federation and the ICRC, have developed psychological and social rehabilitation programmes.

Unfortunately, all of this reflects just a part of the problem. Even as we gather here today, children are being sent into combat. Others are being mutilated by landmines. Still others are being raped, tortured, imprisoned, abandoned, uprooted or condemned to die of hunger or disease. Let us not forget that it is for those children that we must act, without waiting one moment longer.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. José Linati-Bosch, Chairman of the observer delegation of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

Mr. Linati-Bosch (Sovereign Military Order of Malta): Thank you very much, Mr. President, for giving me the floor to address the Assembly at this special session on children, on behalf of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

The Order of Malta has a deep interest in the matter that is occupying the attention of the General Assembly during this special session. Member States and observers, together with the heads of relevant entities of the United Nations, are being given the opportunity to voice their concerns on the future of the world's children.

The global context of the problem must be carefully considered. As with almost all international issues, those concerning children have social, cultural and human rights aspects and related economic and legal consequences. It is necessary to learn from the past and to project this learning into the future if we want to adopt not theoretical, but practical solutions and to transform them into reality — as the Secretary-General has said, to turn our words into actions. As a result of this special session and of the work of the United Nations in general, a world fit for children must be created. The sale of children, child prostitution, child pornography and the involvement of children in armed conflict, like many other evils that afflict mankind, must be eradicated and replaced with the promotion of life, quality education, child protection and the fight against AIDS in children.

Such a programme can reach a satisfactory end only if the international community provides interaction between Governments, United Nations entities, international and supranational entities and organizations from civil society.

Through its humanitarian activities, the Order of Malta takes care of children in different countries, from Brazil and the Dominican Republic to the Holy Land. Our Holy Family Hospital in Bethlehem — a maternity hospital that conducts over 40,000 medical examinations a year — was besieged and damaged as a consequence of the violence in Palestine. This is just one example of armed conflict around the world, which results in displaced persons and refugees, among which children are the group that is most harmed. I myself was able to witness the problems faced by children in refugee camps when I visited them.

With the cooperation of its volunteer corps, the Order of Malta is helping to ensure for children the right to be born and the right to an education, two aspects of human rights that we are trying to protect. The Order of Malta reaffirms its commitment to the aims of the special session of the General Assembly on Children.

The President: I give the floor to Mr. Ridha Bouabid, Chairman of the observer delegation of the International Organization of La Francophonie.

Mr. Bouabid (International Organization of La Francophonie) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, given the lateness of the hour and wishing to respond to your request that each delegation respect the five-minute limit, I shall limit myself to the main points of my statement, the complete text of which will be distributed to participants.

This special session of the General Assembly marks the conclusion of a decade of effort for the implementation of the Plan of Action adopted at the World Summit for Children of December 1990. Unfortunately, it does not mark the implementation of all of the commitments undertaken at that time. Even less does it mark the disappearance of the inequalities and injustices which continue to confront us, or of the crises which continue to arise and to devastate certain parts of the world. For we must indeed note, unfortunately, that we are still powerless in the face of these situations, which prevent children from living their childhood.

The International Organization of La Francophonie, composed of 55 member States having the French language in common, has from the outset worked to support the cause of children and to assist the efforts of the international community for the survival, protection and development of the child. Following the 1990 New York Summit, our heads of State or Government met in Paris in 1991 and decided to convene a conference of ministers responsible for children, with the aim of adopting an appropriate strategy to implement the results of the New York Summit in French-speaking areas. That ministerial conference was held in Dakar in 1993 and led to the adoption of a declaration and a plan of action outlining the framework for a common francophone policy of solidarity for children.

The International Organization of La Francophonie is convinced that investing in children and in young people in general is an investment in peace, stability and the development of tomorrow. That is why the eighth summit of our heads of State or Government, held in Moncton, Canada, in 1999 was devoted to youth. Our leaders undertook to combat, in particular, the exploitation of children — an objective of the draft plan of action to be adopted at this special session. Other common objectives include education; that is an area in which La Francophonie possesses solid expertise through the numerous programmes that it has developed, in particular through its Inter-Governmental Agency, in the areas of education and vocational and technical training. In the same spirit, the two standing francophone ministerial conferences, one dedicated to education, the other to youth and sport, are working to strengthen francophone cooperation on young people.

Likewise, the first women's conference of La Francophonie, held in Luxembourg in February 2000, was another opportunity to show our determination to contribute to the advancement of women, to young girls' access to education and to the elimination of all forms of violence against women and children. The conference took decisions on integration in school programmes and on education for girls and boys on the subjects of citizenship, a culture of peace and human rights.

For its part, the Parliamentary Assembly of La Francophonie met for the first time at Quebec City in July 2001. A francophone youth parliament adopted the Charter of the Young Francophone Citizen of the Twenty-first Century, which deals with five universal priority themes: education, health, fundamental freedoms, information and communication technology and social and cultural questions. None of these actions will be lasting without the corresponding movement to ensure the protection and promotion of the rights of children. Much remains to be done to ensure the legal framework to protect children and to strengthen the means of combating the impunity of those who commit crimes against them.

Therefore, as the Secretary-General of the International Organization of La Francophonie has personally undertaken to do, we must strive to improve the commitment of francophone countries to international and regional legal instruments for a broader ratification of those instruments, as well as to adopt measures to promote compliance with those conventions at the national level.

In conclusion, the future of children cannot be conceived without broader reflection on the future of our planet, whether it relate to the fight against poverty, to the promotion and defence of cultural diversity or to the democratization of access to information and communication technologies. These are all areas in which our children are involved and in which La Francophonie is acting and intends to continue its commitment to contribute to the implementation of the draft declaration on children, which will crown the Assembly's present work.

The President: I give the floor to Ms. Janet Davidson, Vice-President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Ms. Davidson (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): Imagine for a

moment being a child whose daily bread depends on selling bottles she finds on the road. Now imagine the radical difference a drop-in centre would make to your life — warm food, chatting with friends, learning new skills. It would truly be a door opening onto a brighter tomorrow. The Drop Inn centre for street children operated by the Namibian Red Cross Society, is just such a doorway, through which the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, its 178 member societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross are working to change the lives of vulnerable children.

As an organization committed to the principle of serving the most vulnerable in society, it is easy to understand why the Red Cross and Red Crescent is so involved with children. Yet children represent to us not only particularly fragile beneficiaries requiring extra protective measures; they also exemplify the fundamental principles that characterize and inspire our movement.

For example, 1,000 young volunteers are participating in the home care programme of the Red Cross in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They are providing a vital service to lonely housebound elderly people. In Cambodia, young Red Cross volunteers help raise awareness about the deadly threat of landmines. Red Crescent youth in Bangladesh are involved in the campaign to eradicate polio. And the immense power that is generated when children help other children is nowhere more prominent in the Red Cross and Red Crescent world than in Africa, where children are beginning to spearhead the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS and its associated stigma and discrimination.

The International Federation has chosen at the special session on children to focus on the impact of HIV/AIDS on young people. The pandemic is compromising the lives and rights of millions of children around the world. They are deprived of the right to grow up: 4.3 million children under the age of 15 have lost their lives to AIDS. Children are deprived of their right to social and economic security. Thirteen million children have lost the love and care of one or both of their parents. Perhaps worst of all, children affected by HIV/AIDS are robbed of the right to innocence because they are subjected to stigmatization and discrimination. And when children are so stigmatized, it is up to us, the adults, to intervene.

That is why, two days ago, on World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, the International Federation, along with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the Global Network of People Living with AIDS, launched a global action to reduce HIV/AIDS-related stigmatization and discrimination.

Across the world, from Azerbaijan to Zimbabwe, our 97 million members and volunteers are helping pass on the truth about AIDS, breaking down stigma, confronting discrimination, opening eyes and opening minds.

Ensuring that the rights of children become a reality requires a global political commitment. The International Federation calls on Governments fully to endorse the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, signed last June by the leaders of the 189 States Members of the United Nations.

We call on Governments to put the care and protection of children at the forefront of their policies, their legislation and their development plans. As signatories of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they have made a commitment to ensure that children's rights are not compromised. We in the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement are prepared to collaborate with them and with other concerned actors in society to ensure essential care, protection and education for all the world's children.

We in the International Federation believe that collaborating with others is essential in combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and we have taken action to strengthen these collaborations. At the 106th meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) last September, through resolutions adopted, the IPU gave recognition to the contribution of Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers to turning back the tide of HIV/AIDS. They urged States to ensure that all necessary measures are taken to protect children against all forms of discrimination.

We believe that the goals of the Global Action for Children agenda — promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting children from abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS — are achievable within the global community.

By harnessing the leadership of Governments to the power of humanity of the International Red Cross

and Red Crescent movement, we can make a difference. The novelist Graham Greene put it well:

> "There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in". (*The Power and the Glory*)

Please let that moment be now.

The President: I give the floor to Mrs. Ndioro Ndiaye, Deputy Director-General of the International Organization for Migration.

Mrs. Ndiaye (International Organization for Migration) (*spoke in French*): It is a distinct privilege for me to address this General Assembly special session on children on behalf of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). For an international humanitarian organization dealing with vulnerable populations, there is no more heart-rending subject than that of the abuse and exploitation — in all of their tawdry manifestations — of children, the most vulnerable victims.

This is a subject close to my heart, but I will limit my comments to two tragic situations that affect the daily lives of these children: that of children who are victims of war and conflict, and that of children who are victims of trafficking.

In countries involved in armed conflict, millions of children are deliberately targeted, and millions more are either transformed into soldiers or forced to serve the combatants. During periods of strife, children are the first victims of forced displacement, malnutrition, disease and sexual violence. This is something that IOM always keeps in mind when developing and carrying out post-conflict interventions and demobilization programmes.

Allow me to cite a few examples.

In its demobilization activities in Angola between 1994 and 1996, IOM placed special emphasis on the needs of child soldiers, assisting hundreds of minors from the Angolan armed forces and almost 5,000 child combatants from UNITA to return home safely and to reintegrate into civilian society. In Cambodia, from 1994 on, IOM has been coordinating the psychosocial rehabilitation of children and adolescents in rural communities with high concentrations of internally displaced persons who have been exposed to intense civil strife over the past two decades.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo, IOM arranged the evacuation of children for medical treatment abroad when health care was unavailable locally. More recently, in Colombia, IOM has been continuing its efforts to improve and expand existing local infrastructures and to set up a decentralized network of organizations to respond to the needs of recently demobilized child soldiers.

In brief, IOM assists children in armed conflict through the provision of emergency relief assistance to demobilized child combatants and their families, training and access to proper health care. IOM arranges for the voluntary return of children to their families — especially war-affected children — in coordination with various governmental and non-governmental partners. IOM also helps in the development and implementation of post-conflict support programmes through, for instance, psychosocial rehabilitation services.

Although progress has been made, and there are some encouraging signs that more effective measures have been taken at the local, regional and international levels to help children in armed conflict, it is clear that much remains to be done.

Allow me now to turn briefly to the issue of children as victims of trafficking. As in all forms of trafficking of human beings, economics is the primary cause of the trafficking of children. This trafficking has many objectives. Children are trafficked for labour, for participation in armed conflicts, for adoption, marriage, and sexual exploitation. The basic human rights of trafficked children are thus violated daily, and they live in virtual bondage.

The exact number of trafficked people remains unknown. In Asia alone, it is estimated that over the past 30 years, 30 million women and children have been trafficked for sexual exploitation. In Guatemala, according to UNICEF estimates, some 1,000 to 1,500 babies are trafficked abroad every year for adoption by foreign couples in North America and Europe. Asian and Eastern European girls as young as 13 are trafficked as "mail-order brides". In West and Central Africa, large numbers of children are trafficked for domestic work, sexual exploitation, to work in shops or on farms, or to be scavengers or prostitutes.

IOM's objective is to reduce trafficking in migrants, and in children in particular, and to protect

the rights of those who are its victims. Our actions focus on prevention and on assistance.

To help prevent trafficking, IOM organizes seminars and international dialogues. Research is conducted, and the results are widely disseminated. IOM also provides training to increase the capacity of governmental and other institutions to counteract trafficking and to harmonize the necessary policies to combat this scourge.

In the area of assistance, IOM also provides direct assistance as well as legal and medical counselling to trafficked children in transit and receiving countries. We also offer voluntary return and reintegration assistance that is tailored to the individual situation of the children. Moreover, support solutions for children who cannot go back to their own families are identified.

Since today we are saying that investing in children is the only way we can ensure the peace, stability, security, democracy and sustainable development of tomorrow, let us all work to see that the world's children can live in dignity, health and happiness, to guarantee their — and our — tomorrow.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Sila González Calderón, Chairperson of the Observer Delegation of Puerto Rico.

Mrs. González Calderón (Puerto Rico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Any country that genuinely aspires to the progress and development of its society understands the need of producing complete individuals, citizens capable of creating a better life for themselves and for others and capable of creating a future and modernity for their fellow citizens. Sustainable human development, which includes the social, economic, political, cultural and environmental aspects of human potential, is undoubtedly one of the greatest priorities of any society aspiring to progress. Certainly, no stage is more vulnerable and crucial in the comprehensive development of a human being than childhood and adolescence, during which the foundations of the future individual are formed, as is his or her ability to become a complete human being and builder of a better society.

Governments and international financial institutions contributing to that process have recognized that spending on human development is a sound investment, creating the conditions necessary for each individual's full enjoyment of his or her rights as a human being. The process therefore involves much more than merely satisfying the most basic needs; it includes health, education, work and protection from abuse. It also involves efforts for prevention and for instilling the basic values and principles guiding behaviour and life in free and democratic societies.

One of the principles of the Constitution of the Free Associated State of Puerto Rico is to ensure the human rights of each individual in our society. The Charter of Rights states quite clearly that human dignity is inviolable and that all individuals are equal before the law. It also declares that there shall be no discrimination for reasons of race, colour, sex, birth, place of origin or social condition, nor because of one's religious or political beliefs. It further states that both legislation and the public education system shall embody those principles of fundamental human equality.

Nevertheless, the ongoing violation of those rights occurring in some sectors of our society has made it necessary to adopt greater legal safeguards to guarantee respect for and protection of the basic rights of childhood. The inability of the Free Associated State of Puerto Rico to ratify or sign international agreements such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child has led our government to use other mechanisms to incorporate those rights into our legislation.

As part of those initiatives, the Charter of the Rights of the Child was approved in 1998, and the Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Minors, their Fathers, Mothers or Tutors was approved in 2000. Complementing each other, the two acts of legislation establish the State's responsibility to protect minors against all forms of abuse, mistreatment or physical, sexual or emotional violence by family members, tutors or any other person in a position of responsibility. Such protection includes the development and implementation of effective programmes for prevention and treatment, as well as social programmes giving special attention to this problem.

The current administration of the Free Associated State of Puerto Rico is conscious of our children's need for protection and care. That is why, in response to those necessities, the most important sections of the national budget are those of social welfare, education and health.

Much remains to be done. The reality of the situation overwhelms us with tragic news of children

caught up in regrettable circumstances that weaken our society and do not do justice to us as a people and as human beings. The current administration of the Free Associated State of Puerto Rico is committed to improving the situation of children in all its aspects, including education, the lack of supervision, abuse, mistreatment, the loss of values and the lack of awareness of one's rights and the rights of others. The youth not only of Puerto Rico but of most nations represented here urgently require greater attention to the circumstances they face in modern life. Though modern life has brought a great number of innovations and so-called material progress, it has also brought about a number of conditions directly affecting the education and future social behaviour of our young people.

It is certainly a commitment of the State to provide basic security for our young people. However, it is undoubtedly also up to the families — particularly the fathers and mothers of young people, who are an active part of civil society — to organize themselves, to watch out for themselves and for the State and to offer their children a basic foundation in social behaviour. The Free Associated State of Puerto Rico adheres to the principles discussed by the Assembly on the protection of children's human rights. It joins other nations in condemning any entity, whether public or private, that violates those rights. Puerto Ricans are ready to wage this battle.

The President: I give the floor to Mrs. Najma Akbarali Heptulla, President of the Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Mrs. Heptulla (Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union): I am pleased to have this opportunity to address the special session of the General Assembly on children on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), a union of 140 parliaments of the democratic world — with which, Mr. President, you were very closely associated.

IPU's commitment to the well-being of children and protection of their rights has been longstanding. We have spoken out against violence, child exploitation and the scourge of AIDS and have spoken in favour of financing education, health and other programmes for the development of children.

The IPU has strongly supported the ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have also consistently encouraged parliamentary action to implement the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children.

At its conference in Ouagadougou in September 2001, the Inter-Parliamentary Union issued a comprehensive resolution recognizing the need for protecting and caring for children, the driving force of future society, and reaffirming our support for the objectives of this special session. This resolution provided a blueprint for parliamentarians everywhere to take decisive action in support of children and formed the basis for our discussion in the parliamentary forum that the United Nations Children's Fund and IPU jointly organized on 9 May here at the United Nations, when 13 critical areas were discussed.

The IPU mobilized parliaments and their members. More than 200 members of Parliament from over 70 countries participated in that event. Their interventions focused on follow-up and implementation, in other words: action. Parliamentarians listened to the children's point of view.

Parliaments and their members have a very special responsibility. We ratify international conventions and agreements. We legislate, adopt budgets and allocate funds. We oversee the action of Governments and are in constant contact with the people so that we can express their views. We also build popular support for action, both nationally and internationally. It is therefore only natural that many of the suggestions made focused on what we members of parliament can do to build a world fit for children. I will share some of them with you in the short time at my disposal.

Legislation should take a rights-based approach to addressing children's issues. The rights of the child should be enshrined in every national constitution. There is also a need for fundamental laws relating to children. The children who participated in the IPU meeting asked parliamentarians to consult them whenever such laws are being made.

In addition, we recommend a children's rights audit of all legislation that we pass to ensure that we know how it will affect children and that it will affect them in a positive way. We should take a similar approach to the national budget. The budget is more than a financial document; it is a major social policy document. We need to know how the budget affects children, directly and indirectly. We believe that can be

achieved by analyzing the budget from a children's rights perspective.

The overall institutional framework could also be improved. Recommendations were made to establish a commission or an ombudsman for children who would report to the parliament. Other proposals included establishing a parliamentary committee with the specific mandate of addressing children's issues. Moreover, Governments should be invited — some say obliged — to make an annual report to the parliament on its policies, programmes and actions with regard to children. The parliament should hold an annual debate on the issue, during which it would also examine the report.

As I said earlier, those were only the highlights of proposals from the parliamentary meeting of this special session. They call for actions, not just words. In the coming months, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNICEF will work towards a joint strategy to mobilize further parliamentary support for children. We parliamentarians will remain committed to ensuring a world fit for children, and we pledge to do so. But I hope that the commitments made here by world leaders will be implemented and will not remain mere words, and that we, the parliamentarians, will pursue that goal in our Governments and in our parliaments, back home in our respective countries. That is my commitment on behalf of the representatives of 140 parliaments who met with great resolve in Burkina Faso last September.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Mayerly Sánchez of the Hague Appeal for Peace.

Ms. Sánchez (Hague Appeal for Peace) *(spoke in Spanish)*: What a joy and what a great honour to be here at this session today.

My name is Mayerly Sánchez. I come from Colombia, a land of excellent landscapes, animals, fruits and varied climates — a beautiful country that has been affected and destroyed by the situations of violence that we have had to confront for more than 50 years.

All of us young people who participated in the Children's Forum thank the Assembly for giving us the opportunity to share our experiences. Thanks to that opportunity, we noticed that many adults are listening to us and that although our voices are few, they have echoed in the hearts and in the lives of those present here.

This opportunity given to us for our participation at the United Nations leads me to believe that the child representatives of the world have known how to benefit from it. That will be reflected in the results we have presented here. This has not been a parade or a game, as is thought by people who do not trust us and who might cover their ears at the sound of our voices. Our work was reflected in the faces of all the children participating, because it was not only that our voices were listened to, but that the ideas came from various countries, from all the children who are afraid, who suffer hunger, who are uneducated, who have been marked by violence. We had to express and to reflect the cries of all the children who do not understand why there is so much pain in the world.

There are many of us children who were born into and witnessed the most terrible situations of violence, poverty and lack of affection, but that has not led us to give up or to join groups that do harm to the world. We continue to work on behalf of peace and for our rights, because we are sure that it is we who can build the paths whereby the world can detach itself from the great cords of evil and hatred. After that happens, violence will sleep so deeply that it will never wake again, or that the next morning the people who have done wrong will reflect on all their bad deeds and will get up ready to make amends for their errors and to work so that such horrible things will not happen again.

Colombia's national movement of children for peace is already cutting the first strands of that great cord in our country. We are making children's rights known so that we will know when our rights are being violated and will ensure that they are respected, without forgetting our own duties. We are creating awareness and seeking the participation of children and of adults, working with our families, our churches, our schools, our communities and our institutions. Out of those, solutions are coming from people who have directly experienced conflict and do not want others to experience the hardships that they have suffered.

The adults who still do not believe in us cannot continue to cover their ears while they cover children's mouths, because now there are people like those here participating in this session, who can use authority to lead the world in a better way and can help our dreams to flourish in reality. On behalf of all the world's children, we should like to thank the adults who are in this Hall today for making us aware that their ears and their hearts were opened to us. We thank them because

they said yes to children and because we know that from now on, we will be able to work hand in hand with them to change the world so that children's tears will not be ones of sadness or pain, but of happiness, because they will feel supported by people who truly appreciate, respect and believe in them. Thank you for believing in children.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Kailash Satyarthi of the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude.

Mr. Satyarthi (South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude): In a few minutes' time, we shall adopt a new document to make the world fit for children.

But I should like to say that the world has never been unfit for the children of kings and queens and of those who had control over power and wealth for ages. The world has never been unfit for the people and the children who have been in the mainstream of life and of education. The world was always fit for the children in our holy teachings. Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me". The Vedas proclaimed that children are sacred souls, and Islam taught us to see the glow of God in the face of an innocent child. I do not think that the world is too bad for the children of most of us who are present here.

It is not fit, however, for those millions of children of a lesser god who are bought and sold like animals, confined to mines and brick kilns as slaves, locked inside factories and houses, trafficked for domestic labour, or forced into beggary, where sometimes their tiny bodies are mutilated to gain greater sympathy. Nor is it fit for those who are victims of armed conflict, ethnic violence or development-related displacement.

It is not fit for the young girls trapped in the flesh trade or for the kids who are tied down on the backs of camels as jockeys in some gulf countries so that, when the children cry out loudly, the camels run faster, thereby making the master happy. It is not fit for those who are denied basic education or compelled to leave school due to poverty.

The world was not fit for a 14-year-old girl, Gulabo, who died in my lap a couple of years ago. She was born and brought up in bonded labour. Her family and others had to work day in and day out, without wages, at a brick kiln. Eventually, she began to suffer from malnutrition and severe tuberculosis. When, with the help of the Supreme Court of India, we rescued her family and 27 others, and brought them to my office, her health suddenly deteriorated and she collapsed. I cannot forget her last words. She said to her mother, "Mum, I want to live". Her poor mother had to tell her, "No, my child, the world is too cruel for you. I cannot save you".

The world is not fit for such children, not because Gulabo and other children are sinners, but because the ruling elites, with their vested interests, have monopolized all of the opportunities and deliberately left no space for the world's poor children.

Freedom and learning are the birthright of every human being. Any activity that takes away those rights is a crime against nature and humanity. If a child is compelled to work at the cost of her or his freedom and education — for whatever reason — it brings shame on those who exploit the child, and greater shame on those who offer only nice words and empty promises.

The year 2002 will be a historic year for the world's children if we are simply honest with them. This is the year when more than 100 Governments, which have signed the International Labour Organization Convention to ban the worst forms of child labour, must show what results they have achieved in combating child slavery, bonded labour, prostitution and the engagement of children in hazardous work. This is the year when each country must draw up a concrete and time-bound national action plan to ensure education for all, as agreed in Dakar in 2000. This is also the year when the wealthier, developed countries must keep their promises to mobilize additional resources for education.

I strongly recommend that the world community take five steps: end child labour and provide free, quality education for all, as the key to social justice, equity and combating poverty; ensure for the poor a greater share of the world's income; engage in global trade with fairness, work towards sustainable development to sustain humanity; and promote peace, not as a privilege, but as everyone's right.

We in the Global March Against Child Labour have been campaigning and demanding that at least 0.1 per cent of the gross domestic product of the rich countries be devoted to the cause of children. That meagre amount adds up to $25 billion to $30 billion a year — a sum which is more than sufficient to make this word fit for children.

Last month, the world's finance and development ministers endorsed an Education for All (EFA) action plan to mobilize the additional resources needed to provide every child with a free, quality education. We demand that the leaders of the North unite behind that plan, rather than adopting a fragmented approach, imposing conditions or finding new excuses. We commend the Governments of the Netherlands, Germany, Britain and Norway, and the World Bank, for their announcement that they will back the EFA action plan, and we appreciate the commitment of Canada and the United States to increase aid for education. We look with great expectation to President Bush, who has shown great support for education in the domestic context, to take the lead on education at the forthcoming Group of Eight (G8) summit.

Finally, I would like to say that although, unfortunately, the leaders of the North are not here today, we know that they will be in Canada next month, at the G8 summit. We in civil society will follow them. The children of the South will also be watching them carefully. The success of the G8 summit will depend not on promises and words, but on concrete figures for additional resources for education.

I am not prepared to believe that the world is so poor that it cannot ensure freedom and education for its children. As little as 25 cents for every $1,000 of global income — the equivalent of 4 days of military spending — can help in making this world fit for every child. What we need is the global political will. What we demand is action — action today, action now.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Christiana Thorpe of the Forum for African Women Educationalists.

Ms. Thorpe (Forum for African Women Educationalists): After the war in my country, Sierra Leone, the Global Movement for Children campaign there chose the seventh element of the 10-point rallying cry as its clarion call: educate every child.

Since we came here, we have learned that in most of the 94 million pledges signed to say "Yes" for children, the demand to educate every child was paramount. In 1990, education for all — children, adults, male and female — was declared a Summit goal. Yet 12 years on, we are still talking about over 100 million children of primary-school age not being in school. Some 39 per cent of these children are in sub-Saharan Africa, 38 per cent in South Asia; 53 per cent are girls and 47 per cent are boys. The relationship between gender and economic disparity speaks for itself.

The 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, left us with the Dakar Framework for Action, in which Governments and non-governmental organizations pledged to meet our collective commitments for the education of our children. The sub-Saharan regional Framework for Action included, inter alia, the need to pay special attention to street and working children, nomadic communities, children in remote regions and areas of conflict, minority groups, HIV/AIDS orphans, child prisoners and disabled children.

My country has just come through 10 years of armed conflict, and I would like to share with the Assembly a couple of lessons that we learned from our children during the conflict. After the coup of 25 May 1997, thousands of us found ourselves in the neighbouring Republic of Guinea, where we were to become unregistered refugees for the next 10 months.

The Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE) organized a non-formal education programme for our children, in which 3,392 children registered. They all displayed one characteristic syndrome: violence. By then the war was only five years old, and already at that stage our children had imbibed a culture of violence. Yes, violence does beget violence. It dawned on us that we needed to put in place, as a matter of urgency, a strategic plan and systematic programme on education for a culture of peace. That was the first lesson we learned, and now that the guns are silent it is time to effect such a programme.

However there is a major constraint. This morning, 35,310 children took our national primary school examinations. The age range of those children was from 10 to 17 years. Under normal circumstances that exam is taken by 12-year-olds, but we have a surplus of 18,000 children who, because of the war, have had no access to the exam before now. Come the new school year, in September 2002, 50 per cent of those children will not get into school simply because there are no schools. The schools are destroyed and need to be rebuilt. I am saying that as many as 17,000 boys and girls will be out of school six months from now. Will that constitute a foundation for sustainable peace? The Sierra Leone chapter of the Global Movement for Children is focusing on education, and

the non-governmental organizations concerned are very worried about this phenomenon.

The second lesson I would like to share has to do with girl child combatants and rape victims. I just want to tell the story of Zainab, who said the following.

> "I was among the school children captured by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in 1995. When we were captured, we were all taken to a remote base. Then, I was 15 years old and a virgin. I was gang-raped the very night I was captured, as an initiation to the RUF community. We spent three months in military training in the hills there. We were drugged whenever we were to go on mission. On coming back to the base, three particular rebels would ask me for sex. If I dared refuse, I would be forced at gunpoint and gang-raped. They did not want us to escape and join our relatives. They were so cruel to us then — I mean, to most of the girls. I seized the opportunity to escape when we attacked Freetown in January 1999. By then I was eight months pregnant. Barely two months after my escape, I delivered twins, two boys."

Since March 1999, FAWE has worked with 725 girls of between the ages of 12 to 18 years. Their educational needs are enormous: basic education, reproductive health education and motherhood skills. But, above all, they need training in sustainable livelihood skills for self-reliance.

The end of conflict is not synonymous with attaining peace. Sustainable peace must be built on a bedrock of quality basic education for all our children, no matter the circumstances in which they find themselves.

The President: I call now on the Reverend Takeyasu Miyamoto, President of the Arigatou Foundation.

Mr. Miyamoto (Arigatou Foundation) *(spoke in Japanese; English text furnished by the speaker)*: I thank the General Assembly for giving me this opportunity to speak today on the role of people of faith in building a world that is truly fit for children.

With religious people from around the world, the Arigatou Foundation inaugurated the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) to promote inter-religious cooperation for the well-being of children. The statement adopted by the first GNRC forum began with the words of the poet Rabindranath Tagore: "Every child born comes with a message that God has not yet despaired of humankind."

The statement included the conviction that each child bears in her or his very being the hope and promise of the future, as well as remorse over the fact that religious people have often failed to put into practice the deepest insights of their traditions. In that statement we also offered concrete proposals for action for children.

The child has a local context. But in the global dimension it is the child who sustains our hopes and keeps alive the potential for peace. But the horrors of last September and the events that have followed would reject the precious future of the child. Indeed, they have threatened the very foundation of human dignity. The current deterioration of our children's environment is a warning to all the Earth.

With grave and heartfelt concern, we, the GNRC, commit ourselves to pursuing three courses of action. First, we will establish a council on global ethics education for children, consisting of people of faith, educators and others to work in cooperation with the United Nations to help children develop ethical values, faith in the divine and esteem for people of different religions and civilizations. Secondly, we will further strengthen our efforts to eradicate poverty, the root cause of the deteriorating environment that children face, giving attention not only to external causes but also to those that stem from the human heart. Thirdly, we will do our utmost to generate a universal moral force for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to mobilize all people in the Global Movement for Children.

As people of faith, we see the divine presence in every person. It is our obligation to encourage each person to realize the highest potential of the human heart. This divine presence is the eternal wellspring of the dignity of every child and of everyone of us. In conclusion, I would like to repeat, on behalf of the GNRC, our profound commitment to devote ourselves to bringing about, through prayer and practice, this global, silent spiritual revolution for the future of children.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Mary Diaz of the Non-Governmental Organizations Committee on UNICEF.

Ms. Diaz (Non-Governmental Organizations Committee on UNICEF): My name is Mary Diaz and I am Executive Director of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. I am also the Co-chair of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Steering Group of the NGO Committee on UNICEF. I am speaking here this evening on behalf of the Committee.

More than 1,700 representatives from non-governmental organizations have attended this week's special session. They are from more than 116 different countries; nearly half are from the developing world. This is a big difference from the World Summit for Children, when very few NGOs were invited to listen. This General Assembly special session is different; we think we have broken a record.

The United Nations has recognized the important role that civil society organizations play. The presence and participation of children invigorates our work. It affirms the call made in the Convention on the Rights of the Child for children's participation. In partnership with Governments, United Nations agencies and others, non-governmental organizations provide vital services — including health care, education and protection. Perhaps even more importantly, NGOs are critical to monitoring and advocacy for social and legal reforms promoting equality, freedom and justice.

We are able to reach the millions on the margins and provide much-needed assistance to the underserved. Many of the lifesaving achievements for children over the last decade have been accomplished in partnership with NGOs. In many ways great and small, we are responsible for changing the world for children.

For example, NGOs have led the work to rid the world of landmines. This is thanks to the dedication and commitment of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, a network of more than 1,300 NGOs in 90 countries. Just five years after it was founded, 122 countries signed a treaty to ban the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines. To date, 122 countries have ratified the mine-ban treaty.

The Global March against Child Labour, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, the Child Rights Caucus, the Global Health Council, the Global Movement for Children, the new Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict — these are just a few of the NGO groups linking with others to provide leadership on issues affecting children.

NGOs helped found the United Nations and are mentioned in its Charter. They are mentioned also in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. NGOs embraced the idea of the Convention and did not rest until it became a reality. The NGO community had hoped that the special session final document would be a manifesto for the further implementation of the Convention. Unfortunately, these efforts have not been wholly successful. What message does this send to children about the world's commitment to child rights?

NGOs will continue to work to achieve our common goals, such as attaining equality for girls and women, protecting children against HIV/AIDS, ending the exploitation of children, and protecting them from war and other violence. We are committed to working together to monitor national plans of action as well as the commitments made here. I hope participants have had an opportunity to see the NGO Committee's Commitment Chart outlining Government, United Nations and NGO pledges during this special session.

NGOs did have limited access to the negotiation process. Governments must recognize that civil society needs to be present and consulted. Citizens are asked to participate in building strong societies and to hold their Governments accountable. In order to do that, we must have access to policy-making work and negotiations such as the ones at this session.

NGOs have helped give life to the idea of an international community. It is vital to respect and defend their work and to remain vigilant when that work is threatened. We will continue to use information technology as well as meetings like this one to build networks and coalitions. Our partnerships with each other create powerful coalitions that no government can ignore.

The last decade has shown the great things that civil society can contribute. Hundreds of children this week are working on, and learning how to be guardians of, democracy and good governance. We look forward to continuing to work with all present and to break the boundaries of what we can achieve together for children worldwide.

The President: I give the floor to Mr. Burkhard Gnarig of Save the Children Alliance.

Mr. Gnarig (Save the Children Alliance): Over the last decade considerable progress has been made in advancing the rights of millions of children around the world. These advances mean that many more children than ever before do not have to go to bed hungry, do not need to miss school in order to help make ends meet at home, and do not need to suffer ill health and disease.

So it is right at this time, at the first-ever United Nations special session devoted to children, to highlight the fact that progress for children is not only a possibility, it is a reality — a reality that must be built on and strengthened, given the huge challenges that remain. For despite the improvements made, the balance sheet remains unjustly weighted against children.

But what are the key priorities for global action to create a world fit for children? For Save the Children and other civil society groups, the principles and standards of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child must be upheld and applied rigorously. The Convention must act as the cornerstone for all follow-up action from the special session at all levels. It is essential that all future policies and strategies be based on the recognition of children as holders of rights, as participants and social actors — as part of the solution to the challenges that they face, not part of the problem.

This means in practice that, first, the 21 goals of the outcome document are important practical steps towards realizing children's rights in key areas of children's lives. However, these goals will not be achieved unless the global community supports them with conviction, sustained political will and the necessary resources.

Secondly, the protection and enjoyment of children's rights must be properly integrated into trade negotiations and other economic policy-making that affects children's lives. We need to recognize that all economic policies — however distant they seem from children — have an impact on them, whether for good or ill.

Thirdly, poorer countries must be guaranteed the additional resources to realize children's rights, for example, through faster and deeper debt relief and high-quality development assistance. Such resources should be particularly focused on those countries that are prepared to use them to promote and fulfil children's rights. Recent offers of significant increases in official development assistance are welcome but do not come close to the estimated $70 billion required to reach the goals in health and education alone.

Fourthly, long-term investments in basic services must be prioritized to provide universal, quality health and education systems which give every child the possibility of reaching his or her full potential. Protecting children's rights should be a front-line concern during emergencies.

Fifthly, the process of involving children and listening to their needs must become institutionalized in public policy-making and programme delivery. Children and young people must become a central resource in decision-making on issues which have an impact on their lives. The preparatory process for the special session has shown what can be achieved with commitment and goodwill. Save the Children has been proud to play a leading role in supporting the involvement of children and young people in the special session process and will continue to support the active participation of children in the development, implementation and monitoring of national programmes of action in the coming years.

Finally, the Committee on the Rights of the Child should be strengthened to enable it to perform its role more effectively. We urge States parties rapidly to authorize the expansion of the Committee and to provide it with resources that are commensurate with the significance of the task with which it has been charged.

In conclusion, the best route for dramatically transforming the situation faced by children is through the consistent application of children's rights norms and standards for all children, at all times and in all places. To do that, the plans of action for children to be developed at the national level after this special session will need to become practical implementation strategies for the Convention during the next decade. They will also provide a tool through which children themselves can play an active part in building more child-friendly societies.

The President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Marjorie Kabuya of the Christian Children's Fund.

Mrs. Kabuya (Christian Children's Fund): My name is Marjorie Kabuya, and it is a great honour for me to address this special session on children on behalf

of the Christian Children's Fund and other non-governmental organizations that work for children and families affected by HIV/AIDS.

In the short time that is available to me, I will focus my attention on the greatest threat to the gains made thus far in the survival, development, protection and participation of children. It is the threat of HIV/AIDS, especially in Africa. Statistics which appear daily in the media do not adequately convey the human tragedy at the individual and community levels that this epidemic has created. Therefore, I have chosen to explain it through Baraka's story.

Baraka is a 7-year-old girl in a rural project in Kenya. She is sitting in a classroom where the assignment is, "Draw your community today, and then draw your community 10 years from now". In her first drawing, she draws herself, her parents, children playing outside, even a few cows and goats. In her second drawing, projecting 10 years later, she draws herself and some other children, but there is not a single adult in the picture. When a social worker asks her why there are no adults in the picture, she says, "They are all dead".

It is now 10 years later, and Baraka's picture has become a reality for her. She dropped out of school to care for her sick parents. She was a caregiver without information, without skills and without supplies. She is now the head of her family of four siblings. Often, they have neither food nor the money to buy it. The three children are malnourished, and their attendance in school is erratic. They are stigmatized, they are excluded from social activities, and they are referred to as AIDS orphans. In catering for them, she is exposed to abuse, to exploitation and to hazardous labour. She herself is in danger of being infected.

What can Governments, in partnership with non-governmental organizations and other interest groups, do to improve this situation? I will mention three things. First, HIV is preventable. We must prevent new infections. HIV/AIDS knows no borders. We call upon all Governments to declare HIV a disaster, to prioritize it and to make specific commitments and allocate funds to prevention efforts. In determining their prevention approaches, Governments must set aside their own political agendas and philosophies and subordinate them to the best interest of children. The lesson of Africa must be learned by other parts of the world — Latin America, Asia, Central Europe and others. Governments must not wait until more people die before recognizing this pandemic as one of the most urgent crises of our time.

Secondly, we must redefine HIV/AIDS as a problem of young people, especially adolescent girls. The spread and impact of HIV/AIDS are interconnected with other fundamental problems of development. Governments must recommit themselves to serious and sustainable actions to address the issues of poverty, reducing and preventing conflicts — which cost a lot of money — and improving the status of women. Those issues must be addressed in a holistic and integrated manner which includes children's opinions and contributions. We must invest in children, since they are the foundation of sustainable development. Providing for children must be prioritized as a political issue and must be seen as investing in the basis of future economic and social development.

Thirdly, we must support AIDS orphans. Baraka and her siblings are now in danger of losing their home and their land to their uncle, who claims ownership because of the customary inheritance system. Where can she go for help? Governments must make those who are infected and affected by AIDS a priority for policy and legal protection. Children must be protected from abuse, neglect, disinheritance and premature withdrawal from school through child-friendly and enforceable laws and through the provision of education on the legal rights of children to communities. There is a need to provide legal assistance to children in property disputes or to modify dispute resolution procedures so that reliance on legal assistance becomes unnecessary. Following the example of community health as a response to a lack of doctors, we now need an equivalent and appropriate response to a lack of lawyers.

Fourthly, as we enter the third decade of the pandemic, we call upon Governments and non-governmental organizations to make commitments to identify, develop, support and scale up successful prevention strategies and care models. Governments, non-governmental organizations and other donors must focus more funding on building the capacity of communities to handle the problems of Baraka and of her peers. The extended family structure should be assisted, and where it is overwhelmed, alternatives need to be supported. For example, the Christian Children's Fund is supporting neighbourhood groups

that are helping Baraka and her siblings to keep their home, to stay together as a family and to remain in school. Innovative strategies and models need to be documented, replicated and shared as widely and as quickly as possible. The time for action is now. We have discussed the problem; we know the magnitude of the problem, and we must not allow it to prevent us from acting. We need to act now on what we know.

In conclusion, the leaders represented here today, and all other adults, are responsible for addressing the crisis of hope represented in Baraka's picture. We appeal to all participants, to all interest groups and to all Governments to make commitments and to allocate funds and people to those commitments so that children can again believe that they can live longer and healthier lives and can have better chances in life than their parents did. Let us put more people and more hope in Baraka's picture.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Marija-Dubravka Uzelac of the Mali Korak Centre for the Culture of Peace and Non-Violence.

Ms. Uzelac (Mali Korak Centre for the Culture of Peace and Non-Violence): It is a privilege for me to address this special session of the General Assembly on behalf of non-governmental organizations passionately and devotedly working at the grassroots level on children's rights.

I would like to begin with the following pledge: there shall be no more children in armed conflict; peace is every child's right. This special session of the General Assembly on children presents an opportunity for world leaders, agencies and civil society actors to mobilize all their efforts to create a world with children. That means conditions that will enable all of our children to live a full and dignified life.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, legal efforts were made to protect children in wartime. At the end of twentieth century in Europe, in the region of the former Yugoslavia, as the consequence of war activities, children's rights were violated in disastrous proportions. Children were killed, wounded, forcibly displaced or separated from their families. It is assumed that 10,000 unaccompanied refugee children from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were either forcibly displaced or sent outside war zones by their parents in order to save their lives.

Conflicts throughout the world have caused unacceptable suffering to children. Around the world, there are tens of thousands of children who, because of wars, are denied their rights to life, safety and education. War destroys everything: our homes, our families, our schools, our communities, our bodies and our physical and mental well-being. War destroys childhood. War-affected children are at greater risk of growing into a generation of adults who are more committed to violence than to peace. One of the tragic impacts of war in the region of the former Yugoslavia was the distortion of values. The culture of peace had turned into a culture of war.

World leaders have made strong commitments to their children's well-being. They must now move beyond those promises to concrete actions. It is as the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has said: "Investing in children is investing in a more prosperous and stable world". Or, as Graça Machel said, "children should be considered 'the zones of peace'". Or, as a 16-year-old girl, one of the 4,000 unaccompanied refugee children who fled from Bosnia and Herzegovina and found refuge in Croatia, said, "I am not a prophet. I can't foresee the future, but I hope for a future without war, illness, hunger and powerlessness". This message, and the many other powerful messages that young boys and girls have addressed to the world of adults in the last few days, has to be respected by all of us.

This is not only a pledge to stop war, with its horrific levels of violence and brutality that abandon all human standards. It is much more: it is a call to build a new culture of peace and a new paradigm of culture where no international emergency relief for victims of conflict will be needed any more. It is not only the United Nations that has increasingly become involved in peacekeeping, peacemaking and peace-building efforts. There are already thousands of peace educators all around the world making huge efforts to introduce a culture of peace.

We should be able to do more for children's rights in the new millennium. In the next decade, the Global Movement for Children should also be used as a powerful tool to make changes in our global cultural paradigm. Power and greed can never be an excuse for sacrificing children. No one — not the United Nations, not regional organizations, not Governments, not civil society groups — has moved quickly enough or done enough. The international community, in all its

manifestations, must adopt a new sense of urgency. The Global Movement for Children could perhaps be one of the forces and one of the ways for change, involving each and every one of us — involving every citizen of every nation, every public and private entity, every national leader and, above all, every child and every adolescent.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda items 8 and 9.

Agenda item 3 *(continued)*

Credentials of representatives to the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly

(b) Report of the Credentials Committee (A/S-27/18)

Draft resolution (A/S-27/18, para. 13)

Amendment (A/S-27/L.2)

The President: I give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): Following your appeal, Mr. President, to make this special session on children a memorable occasion, and after consultations among the sponsors of the amendment to the draft resolution of the Credentials Committee, we have decided not to insist on a vote on our amendment, contained in document A/S-27/L.2.

For the record, we wish to state that this amendment was in line with the declaration of the Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement, who met from 27 to 29 April 2002 in Durban, South Africa. It is based on, and reflective of, international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

In that light, we intend to raise this matter during the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, which will begin on 10 September 2002. We request that our letter in this regard be distributed as an official document of the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh special session, under agenda item 3.

The President: Members have noted the statement made by the representative of South Africa.

The Assembly will now take action on the draft resolution recommended by the Credentials Committee in paragraph 13 of its report (A/S-27/18).

The Credentials Committee adopted the draft resolution without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution S-27/1).

The President: Before giving the floor to the delegation wishing to speak in explanation of vote, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Alaei (Islamic Republic of Iran): My delegation would like to express its reservation on those parts of the resolution contained in document A/S-27/18, paragraph 13, which may be construed as recognition of Israel.

The President: We have heard the only speaker in explanation of position.

We have thus concluded our consideration of agenda item 3.

Agenda items 8, 9 *(continued)* **and 10**

Review of the achievements in the implementation and results of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s

Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade

Adoption of the final document

Draft resolution (A/S-27/L.1)

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee (A/S-27/19)

The President: In connection with the draft resolution contained in document A/S-27/L.1, I have been informed by the sponsors that there is an agreement not to take action on this draft resolution in the light of the consensus reached in the final document.

For the text of the report of the Ad Hoc Committee, representatives can turn to document A/S-27/AC.1/L.1 and addenda 1-3, as well as document A/S-27/AC.1/L.2.

I now request the Rapporteur of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty-seventh special session, Ms. Lidija Topic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to introduce the report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

Ms. Topic (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Rapporteur of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole: It is my great privilege and great personal honour to introduce to the plenary of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly the report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole contained in document A/S-27/19.

The Committee held two meetings, one on Wednesday, 8 May, and one on Thursday, 9 May, the latter of which was suspended and later resumed on Friday, 10 May 2002. Members of the Committee also conducted round-the-clock informal consultations which cleared the way for the adoption of the report.

The report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole is composed of three chapters. Chapter I, "Introduction", covers the proceedings of the Ad Hoc Committee. The Committee had the opportunity to listen to presentations by Member States, United Nations agencies and representatives of non-governmental organizations. The Committee also heard statements from a number of child representatives that brought a fresh perspective to the debate in the Committee.

All of these statements highlighted commitments and experience in promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence and combating HIV/AIDS.

Chapters II and III reflect the decision by the Committee to recommend to the twenty-seventh special session the draft resolution contained in document A/S-27/AC.1/L.2 for its adoption.

Here I should like to draw the attention of representatives to revisions required to the last line in document A/S-27/AC.1/L.2. The words in parentheses "to be issued" should be deleted and the numbers 2 and 3 should be inserted. These three addenda to document A/S-27/AC.1/L.1 incorporate the agreed text to all the pending paragraphs in document A/S-27/2/Add.1 (Part II).

Before concluding, I should like to pay tribute to all of the delegations, including those of the United Nations system and of non-governmental organizations for their active participation in the deliberations of the Ad Hoc Committee. Their tireless efforts to help the children of the world, our most precious resources, will be noted by future generations. I should like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee for guiding the Committee's proceedings with such skill and diligence.

I should also like, on behalf of the Committee, to extend our most sincere gratitude also to the Vice-Chairpersons of the Committee, and particularly to Ambassador Hanns Schumacher of Germany, for their invaluable contributions to the successful conclusion of the work of the Committee.

Finally, permit me to express our gratitude to the staff of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and to the United Nations Secretariat, who have provided vital assistance to the Bureau and to the Ad Hoc Committee.

With these remarks, I present to the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly the report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole for its consideration and approval.

If there is no proposal under rule 66 of the rules of procedure, I shall take it that the Assembly will not discuss the report.

I hear none.

It was so decided.

The President: The Assembly will now proceed to take a decision on the draft resolution recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty-seventh special session in document A/S-27/AC.1/L.2.

The draft resolution is entitled "A world fit for children". The text of the annex to the draft resolution is contained, for the time being, in documents A/S-27/2/Add.1 (Part II) and corrigenda 1 and 2, and A/S-27/AC.1/L.1/Add.1, 2 and 3.

The draft resolution was recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty-seventh special session for adoption.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution S-27/2).

The President: I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in explanation of

position on the resolution just adopted. May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Interiano (El Salvador) *(spoke in Spanish)*: The delegation of El Salvador would like to express its satisfaction at the consensus achieved in the negotiations that led to the adoption of the outcome document, "A world fit for children". We are sure that this will contribute to the strengthening of national policies and to the advancement of children and young people.

Nevertheless, with respect to the chapter entitled "Promoting healthy lives", in which goals and commitments concerning sexual and reproductive health are established, the delegation of El Salvador wishes to reaffirm the position adopted in the context of the Declaration and Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, held at Cairo in 1994. With regard to reproductive rights, sexual and reproductive health and family planning, El Salvador clearly understands those concepts not to embrace or include in any way the promotion of abortion as a method of regulating fertility or as a health service, since, in its Constitution and in secondary legislation, El Salvador recognizes and protects the human being from the moment of conception, and prohibits abortion.

Accordingly, the delegation of El Salvador reserves the right to apply this interpretation in all present and future discussions on the issue of sexual and reproductive health. Thus we should be much obliged if this interpretive statement were to be recorded in the final report of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly on children.

Mr. Niehaus (Costa Rica) *(spoke in Spanish)*: First of all, I should like to congratulate you, Sir, as well as Ambassadors Durrant, Chowdhury and Schumacher, on your outstanding efforts in the difficult endeavour of conducting our work, both during the session and in the preparatory meetings.

Speaking in my capacity as Chairman of the Rio Group, I should like to make the following statement. The countries of the Rio Group reaffirm their commitment to the development of their peoples, in particular to the advancement of the rights of the child and the well-being of children and adolescents. The countries of the Rio Group joined the consensus on the outcome document, convinced that its implementation, together with respect for the international standards established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols and in the agreements reached at United Nations conferences — in particular those held at Cairo, Copenhagen, Beijing and Monterrey and their follow-up — will ensure a better future for the world's children and adolescents. In reaffirming the consensus of Lima of 1999, that of Kingston of 2000 and that of Panama of 2001, the Rio Group reaffirms its conviction that our region's future is based on advances and policies for children and adolescents.

I shall now speak in my national capacity. The Government of Costa Rica wishes to place on record that, in conformity with its constitutional provisions and with the fundamental principles governing its foreign policy, nothing in this text may be interpreted as an explicit or implicit endorsement of abortion. Costa Rica considers that the text must be interpreted in conformity with children's fundamental right to life from the very moment of conception and with the family's fundamental role as the basic unit of society.

I should be much obliged if this statement were to be included in the report of this special session and in the record of this meeting.

Mr. Liwski (Argentine Republic) *(spoke in Spanish)*: Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your outstanding work to secure the approval of the important document that we have just adopted. In joining the consensus on that text, my delegation would like to make the following statement.

With regard to the latter part of paragraph 29 of the outcome document, "A world fit for children", the Republic of Argentina understands that the reservations expressed and the interpretive statements made by our country in acceding to the Convention on the Rights of the Child do not restrict, but rather broaden, the rights proceeding from the Convention. Thus they cannot be considered incompatible with its object and purpose.

Moreover, my delegation wishes to state that the capacity to formulate reservations with regard to international treaties constitutes a sovereign power of States, recognized in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. Therefore, States considering such reservations should not withdraw from treaties peremptorily. My delegation is aware that the possibility of formulating reservations encourages

many accessions to international treaties, thus enabling those treaties' basic principles to be embraced.

Our country wishes also to reaffirm the interpretive statements made at the International Conference on Population and Development, held at Cairo in 1994; with respect to the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing in 1995; at the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, held in 1996; and at the World Food Summit, held at Rome in 1996.

With respect to paragraph 15 of the outcome document just adopted, the Republic of Argentina would like to state that the concept of the family to which it refers is understood as the institution whose origin is the union of a man and a woman whereby children are born, nourished and educated, in conformity with article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with article 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which form part of Argentina's constitutional law.

Concerning the document's references to gender perspectives, our country interprets them as the equal opportunity of boys and girls, in accordance with their natural differences, to accede to the full exercise of the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Mr. Casco Fortin (Honduras) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of the Republic of Honduras, with due respect, asks the President of this special session of the General Assembly on children that the following interpretive statement be incorporated in its entirety into the final report of the special session.

The delegation of Honduras welcomes the adoption of the outcome document entitled "A world fit for children". It does so with the intention, as a sovereign country, to continue to make its best efforts to contribute to the creation of a better and more appropriate environment for the children of Honduras and of the entire world. It takes this opportunity to reaffirm its intention to strengthen the institution of the family, to improve substantially our children's health and education and thus to contribute to reducing the poverty in our country, always bearing in mind that motherhood and childhood are social rights enshrined in our Constitution and protected by the State.

In that regard, this interpretive statement reaffirms the content of the reservations expressed by the Republic of Honduras at international conferences at past special sessions of the General Assembly and at meetings of its specialized agencies. Those reservations shall be taken into account with respect to words, terms, concepts or paragraphs in this outcome document, wherever they may be applicable.

The Republic of Honduras will therefore endorse today's commitment to the children of the world on the basis of the following considerations. First, we will do so in accordance with the moral, ethical, religious and cultural principles that govern our society, taking into account the fundamental pillars provided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Constitution of the Republic and other related legal instruments.

Secondly, we will do so with respect for the inviolable rights and dignity of all human beings and the right to life from the moment of conception until natural death, reaffirming our recognition of the current and universal validity of those and other human rights.

Thirdly, we recognize the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society, the means by which values are transmitted, the meeting point for generations and an indispensable framework for the holistic development of children.

Fourthly, we uphold the right of a man and a woman to enter into matrimony or a de facto union.

Fifthly, we reaffirm the importance of teaching children values and sexual abstinence as essential elements for promoting responsible sexual behaviour and parenthood and as a means of preventing sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS, as well as adolescent pregnancy, while respecting the inalienable right of parents to choose the type of education that their children will receive and to provide them with care, support and protection.

Mr. Arias (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): The European Union warmly welcomes the agreement reached this evening. We believe that it will promote the rights of children and adolescents throughout the world. A long preparatory process, lasting for almost two years, has culminated in the adoption of this document. Successive presidencies of the European Union have worked on the Declaration and Plan of

Action, always seeking the greatest possible degree of consensus.

We acknowledge that the language of the text does not fully reflect international commitments in the important area of reproductive health services for adolescents. However, we have all had to make concessions during the process. The European Union would have liked the document to reflect the progress made at the International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey less than two months ago.

We would like in particular to highlight the significant level of agreement reached on a series of issues affecting the current and future status of boys, girls and adolescents: the commitments reached with regard to reducing infant mortality, protecting children from violence and exploitation, providing access to education, eradicating poverty and eliminating child labour. These are Millennium Development Goals, to which we committed ourselves in 2000. We reaffirm our commitment to attaining these goals for our children.

Furthermore, we welcome the clear-cut references to capital punishment contained in the document that has just been adopted, as well as the affirmation that our actions to benefit children must be guided by respect for the rights of the child.

Finally, the European Union would like to thank the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, the Bureau and all who were involved in the negotiations, as well as the facilitators and the Secretariat, for their patience, understanding and invaluable contributions to the creation of a just world for all.

Mr. Sevilla Somoza (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): Nicaragua endorses and supports the consensus decision reached on the final document of the twenty-seventh special session, entitled "A world fit for children", and joins in the global commitment to children. We reaffirm all of the reservations that we have expressed in the past with regard to the outcomes of other United Nations conferences and special sessions, and we would like to make the following interpretative statement.

It is the understanding of Nicaragua that this document is not legally binding and that the commitments agreed to are recommendations, their implementation being the sovereign right of the State of Nicaragua. We believe that the concept of sexual and reproductive health should be applied within a holistic health context that implies personal maturity and responsibility. Nicaragua reaffirms and recognizes that the right to life, from the moment of conception until natural death, is the inalienable and fundamental right of a human being. In this context, we understand that the term "sexual and reproductive health" does not extend to abortion. Nicaragua recognizes marriage and de facto stable unions between a man and a woman, and understands the term "various forms of the family" to refer only to those families shaped by procreation proceeding from the union of a man and a woman, the extended family and single-parent families.

I request that this interpretive statement be included in the final report of the special session.

Mr. Siv (United States of America): On behalf of the United States delegation, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this immensely successful special session on children. We salute the tireless work of Ambassadors Patricia Durrant of Jamaica, Hanns Schumacher of Germany and Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury and Anwarul Chowdhury of Bangladesh. Their outstanding leadership made possible a strong consensus outcome document, which will serve as an agenda for action on behalf of children in the coming years. We express our appreciation to Carol Bellamy and the United Nations Children's Fund for putting together this extraordinary event. The special session will mean greater hope for children around the world. The United States reaffirms its commitment to work for their well-being everywhere, recognizing that children are best nurtured in a stable, loving family environment.

We also wish to include the following explanation of position in the official record of this special session. First, concerning references in the document to United Nations conferences and summits and their five-year reviews, the United States does not understand any endorsement of these conferences to be interpreted as promoting abortion.

Secondly, the United States understands the terms in the document relating to basic social services, such as education, nutrition, health care, including sexual and reproductive health, quality health-care services, reproductive health care, family planning, sexual health, reproductive health and safe motherhood, in no way to include abortion or abortion-related services, or

the use of abortifacients. The United States does not include the treatment of injuries or illnesses caused by illegal or legal abortion — for example, post-abortion care — among abortion-related services.

Thirdly, the United States fully supports the principle of voluntary choice in family planning, and reiterates that in no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning and that women who have had recourse to abortion should in all cases have humane treatment and counselling provided to them.

The United States emphasizes its commitment to programmes that address greater male involvement in pregnancy prevention and in voluntary family planning efforts. It emphasizes the need to stress the practices of abstinence, delaying sex initiation, monogamy, fidelity and partner-reduction in order to, inter alia, prevent HIV infection.

Fourthly, the United States stresses the importance it attaches to universal access to primary and secondary education, particularly for girls, as an essential and integral part of women's sustainable social and economic development.

Fifthly, the United States reaffirms that "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State" (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights, resolution 217 A (III), article 16.3*); that "the right of men and women of marriageable age to marry and found a family shall be recognized" (*International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, resolution 2200 A (XXI), article 23.2*); and that "motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance" (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 25.2*).

The United States stresses the need to further address the importance of family stability, the role of fathers and parent-child communication on responsible sexual behaviour, especially on abstinence and on delaying sexual initiation. With regard to the phrase "various forms of the family exist", the United States understands this to include single-parent and extended families. It reaffirms that Governments can support families by promoting policies that help strengthen the institution of marriage and help parents raise their children in positive and healthy environments.

Sixthly, the United States understands that children's rights are seen at all times in relation to the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents, who have the primary responsibility for their children's education and well-being. In this regard, the United States emphasizes the importance it attaches to the involvement of parents in decisions affecting children and adolescents in all aspects of sexual and reproductive health and in all aspects of their lives and education, for which they have the primary responsibility.

Ms. Limpias (Bolivia): My delegation joins this consensus as a triumph for the right of children and adolescents everywhere. The reaffirmation of prior United Nations agreements and the furtherance of commitments we have made here at the special session provide us with a strong action plan to make the world more fit for children. The outcome document essentially covers all key aspects of children's lives, from the fundamental right to survival, safety and protection to love and support from their families and communities, to education and health, to freedom from all forms of abuse, violence and exploitation.

One fundamental set of human rights, however, continues to be ignored, neglected, resisted or rejected: the reproductive rights of adolescents. This is so even seven years after 179 countries of all the world adopted the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, which explicitly recognized reproductive rights, including those of adolescents, as human rights.

In Bolivia, which has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the Americas — many of the deaths being those of poor young women who begin child-bearing early — I can affirm that the issue of adolescents' reproductive rights is about a young woman's very right to life. The majority of the Bolivian population is indigenous, with multiple cultural and linguistic traditions. A large proportion of the people of my country live in poverty and are marginalized, with limited access to health services, especially in rural and more remote areas that are difficult to reach, not only geographically or financially but in terms of gender, culture, language and class boundaries. Young women suffer due to all those factors, especially when such factors are compounded by their age, sex and ethnic origins. This is our reality, and it would be irresponsible to ignore it.

The Government of Bolivia joins the consensus reflected in the outcome document with the special

significance attached to the recognition of every child's right to unbiased and full information, knowledge, skills, health services, well-being and development.

My delegation would very much appreciate this statement being reflected in the records of this meeting.

Mr. Laurin (Canada): The outcome document we have adopted today makes a number of key advances on priority issues for children, including indigenous children and affected children, and child and youth participation. The document is an important step forward in relation to the Plan of Action of 1990 with regard to the promotion and protection of child rights. We believe that these and other advances will make a real contribution to the lives of children worldwide.

While we supported consensus, we would like to register our dissatisfaction with the debate that ensued over the issue of sexual and reproductive health. This is a critical issue to the health, survival and well-being of children and adolescents around the world. This document falls significantly short.

We reiterate our strong support for ensuring the right to the highest attainable standard of health, including the right to make informed choices about one's own sexual and reproductive health. Services which include safe, reliable and high-quality family planning methods, as well as information, education and counselling, are an essential part of a comprehensive health care programme. Access to these programmes and services should be equitable and responsive to diversity.

Recent conferences and summits, in particular the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, as well as their five-year reviews, were significant steps forward in the understanding of the issues and of what is needed for implementation and action. It is regrettable that attempts were made during the negotiations to retrench on previously agreed and long-standing language. We therefore stress that the outcomes of Cairo, Beijing and other conferences and their reviews will continue to serve as our benchmark for future action. We request that this statement be made part of the official record of the special session.

Mr. Alaei (Islamic Republic of Iran): My delegation joined the consensus on the outcome document of this special session of the General Assembly on children. We consider the outcome document of this special session to be of great importance in the promotion and protection of the rights of children, as well as in securing their well-being in the years ahead.

We would, however, like to emphasize that we will interpret those parts of the outcome document which relate to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in line with our position, as defined and enunciated by my Government upon its ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In conclusion, I would like to express my delegation's sincere appreciation to Ambassador Durrant of Jamaica, Ambassador Schumacher of Germany and Ambassador Chowdhury of Bangladesh, and their able teams, for their dedication, devotion and hard work during the preparatory process.

Mr. Jaló (Guinea-Bissau) (*spoke in French*): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the remarkable work that you have accomplished.

I would like, on behalf of my country, Guinea-Bissau, to say that we are prepared to implement all the decisions and recommendations of this special session on children. But I would also like to say that we reserve the right not to implement any decision or recommendation that would be incompatible with our Constitution or laws or with the ethics of our people.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the Holy See.

Ms. De Souza (Holy See): The Holy See expresses its appreciation to the General Assembly and the Preparatory Committee for the work carried out over the past two years — work that contributed to the success of this twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, devoted to children. My delegation also expresses thanks to Ambassador Durrant, Ambassador Chowdhury and Ambassador Schumacher for their tireless efforts in leading and directing the discussions, as well as to the staff of the United Nations Children's Fund, which acted as the substantive secretariat throughout the preparatory process.

My delegation welcomes the consensus decision of the Assembly to adopt the document entitled, "A world fit for children". While welcoming its adoption, the Holy See, in conformity with its nature and its particular mission, would like to state its understanding

of the document. Nothing that the Holy See has done during this process should be understood or interpreted as an endorsement of concepts that it cannot accept for moral reasons. This should in no way be interpreted as constituting a change in its well-known position concerning those subjects about which the Holy See has made reservations during past United Nations conferences and summits. Those reservations and statements of interpretation remain in effect, and relate to issues regarding fundamental human rights and dignity, protection, the provision of basic social services, education, health, sexuality and the family, the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents, and especially the right to life from the moment of conception.

The Holy See is convinced that the best interests of the child are best served in the context of the family. The Holy See interprets references to family or families in terms of the duty to strengthen the family, the basic unit of society, and in terms of marriage as an equal partnership between man and woman — that is, between husband and wife.

The Holy See requests that this statement be included in the report of the special session, as well as in the verbatim record of this meeting.

I now give the floor to the representative of Benin, who wishes to make a statement on behalf of the Group of African States.

Ms. Ayemona (Benin) (*spoke in French*): Despite the fact that some States have made interpretative and explanatory statements, the African Group welcomes the outcome of this special session. By adopting the final outcome document, entitled "A world fit for children", the international community has committed itself once again to working for the well-being of children in all spheres.

On behalf of the African Group, Benin, which is chairing the Group this month, would like, through me, sincerely to thank all the participants who have made an effective contribution to the formulation and adoption of this historic document. We offer our warm congratulations to Ambassador Patricia Durrant for her tireless efforts during the preparatory stage, helping us to meet the challenge of producing this valuable document for the benefit of children.

We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Secretary-General Kofi Annan and to Ms. Carol Bellamy for their ongoing concern for children, as well as for the invaluable support they provided to the experts during the negotiations.

I cannot conclude without thanking all the facilitators for their determination, as well as all those who, directly or indirectly, helped to make this second world summit for children a success. Let us always say "Yes" for children.

The President: We have thus concluded our consideration of agenda items 8, 9 and 10.

I give the floor to Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, who will make a statement on behalf of the Secretary-General.

Ms. Bellamy (United Nations Children's Fund): It is my honour to be here on behalf of the Secretary-General, who has been such an advocate and supporter of children's central role in achieving global peace and development.

I would like to begin my remarks by expressing appreciation to the members of the Preparatory Committee, the various negotiating groups and the very long-serving and excellent members of the Bureau: Ambassador Durrant, Ambassador Schumacher, Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, Ambassador Iftekhar Chowdhury, Ambassador Topic and Ambassador Tall.

I would also like to express my thanks to the over 60 summit-level participants and the other representatives from 170 countries, to the non-governmental organizations, to the representatives of the private sector, to the religious leaders, to the parliamentarians, to the paediatricians and to the children and young people themselves. I also express my thanks to the conference services staff, to my wonderful, extraordinary colleagues at the United Nations Children's Fund and, Mr. President, to you as well.

In his opening statement, the Secretary-General mentioned that this special session had to be truly special. Indeed it has been. We have had three days of extraordinary meetings. This has been the first session of the General Assembly in which children were not only seen, but were heard. They captured our hearts; they captured our minds. They inspired us with their energy and their enthusiasm. They reminded us of our past promises, and they asked for action now. "We are

not only the future, we are also the present", they said. "We are not an expenditure, we are an investment", they said. The Secretary-General has repeatedly recognized not only that children are an investment but that investing in children is the first, essential step toward breaking the cycle of poverty.

The Assembly has just approved a strong, action-oriented document so appropriately called "A world fit for children". The goals for children that members have just committed to are at the very heart of the Millennium Development Goals. On behalf of the Secretary-General, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, members of the General Assembly. On behalf of the Secretary-General, I would like to remind you that now is the time for action.

Closing statement by the President

The President: I wish to congratulate all participants on the quality of the debate over the last three days, on their commitment and, above all, for the adoption of a new agenda for children: a framework for action to ensure the well-being of every child in every country.

This special session would not have been so highly productive without the invaluable contributions of Member States, many of whom were represented by heads of State or Government, the full commitment of civil society and, above all, children and young people themselves.

A record number of side events have taken place, in which Member States, United Nations agencies, inter-governmental organizations, religious leaders, parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations and the private sector met together with children to share their experience and vision and, above all, to discuss how to translate words into action at all levels. The discussions were lively and interactive, which enriched this special session in a most profound way. I wish to thank all the participants.

Building on the lessons learned since the World Summit for Children in 1990 and taking into account the emerging challenges and opportunities of today's world, we have adopted a Plan of Action that establishes new goals for children, key actions to be taken to meet those goals and strategies to monitor our progress. The Plan of Action sets out specific targets to be achieved in the fields of health, education, protection against abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS among children.

In that regard, the special session should not be seen as an end in itself. It is a milestone in a long journey that began in 1990 with the World Summit for Children, that gathered momentum during the 1990s and that has brought us all here to plan our course for the future.

And what have we agreed? We have agreed to build a world fit for children and to make it a better place for them to grow up in, a place where their basic needs will be met, where their rights will be respected and promoted. That sounds ambitious, but we have adopted a Declaration that very clearly describes the steps we must take to build a new world fit for children. It does so in a clear, concise and robust manner. It is a practical and achievable checklist, not only for a better future but also for immediate action that will improve child well-being today. Significant national efforts, including the mobilization of human, financial and material resources, are essential for achieving the targets in the outcome document. The leadership of each Member State should show its commitment to this end.

At this juncture, it is crucially important to recognize that chronic poverty remains the biggest obstacle to promoting the welfare of children in many developing countries. The international development goals and strategies agreed upon at major United Nations conferences, in particular the Millennium Summit, should be continuously pursued by the international community in order to assist developing countries in eradicating poverty and promoting the well-being of children.

In closing, I wish to give special recognition and thanks to Her Excellency Ambassador Patricia Durrant of Jamaica, who served as Chairperson of the Committee of the Whole, and to the other members of the Bureau for their excellent work which has contributed to the success of this special session. I should also like to thank Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, and her staff for their tireless efforts and wholehearted dedication to ensuring the success of this historic session. Last but not least, I wish to thank members of the Secretariat, including the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services and all

other departments that devoted exemplary service to the special session.

The real work of creating a world fit for children has only just begun. But our achievements thus far should give us the confidence to face the arduous challenges ahead. On behalf of the world's children, I call upon all participants to commit themselves fully to this most imperative of tasks.

Agenda item 2 (*continued*)

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The President: I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Closure of the twenty-seventh special session

The President: I declare closed the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 12.55 a.m., Saturday, 11 May 2002.